Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma amongst Aboriginal Women in Regina, Saskatchewan

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts
in
Justice Studies
University of Regina

By
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February 2016

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Renée Jo Marie Hoffart, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Justice Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma Amongst Aboriginal Women in Regina, Saskatchewan*, in an oral examination held on December 18, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

The combined effects of colonialist efforts, namely the Indian Residential School System, have had a negative impact on Aboriginal populations in Canada. This project identified a relationship between experiencing intergenerational trauma as a result of attendance at an Indian Residential School and subsequent domestic violence and its normalization in an intimate partner relationship. Through the use of the interview methodology, the researcher collected data from five First Nations women who had previously been victims of domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship and had some connection to the Indian Residential School System in Canada. Results from the interviews were analyzed using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in order to assess the relationships between the issues discussed in the data. This research lends to a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence in First Nations female populations and may subsequently assist in the formation of solutions to absolve the aforementioned issue.

Keywords: Indian Residential School System, intergenerational trauma, domestic violence, interpersonal violence, Aboriginal/First Nations women
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the participants who took part in this research project. It is an honour to be able to give a voice to your courageous stories so that they can further the discourse on violence against First Nations women. Your strength and resilience is truly inspiring. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Nicholas Jones for his knowledge, patience, and guidance throughout this process. You recognized my potential, had confidence in my abilities, and consistently pushed me to do my best. Thank you for always encouraging me to be a stronger writer and researcher, your dedication was truly appreciated. Thank you to Dr. Michelle Stewart for her expertise and understanding of the issues relating to structural violence, colonialism, and the Indian Residential School System. I appreciated the fact that you often challenged me to further my analysis and consider the components of my research more critically. Thank you to Dr. Shauneen Pete for her insight and knowledge of issues relating to the First Nations community. Your contributions were critical to this process as they ensured a culturally sensitive perspective and accurate representation of First Nations issues throughout my work. Next, I would like to thank the Department of Justice Studies and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for granting me funding opportunities throughout my graduate program. I want to express gratitude to my parents, Shannon and Dennis Hoffart, my grandparents, Emile and Josie Tessier and Marie Hoffart, and my sister, Raelyn Redman. You encouraged me and expressed confidence in my abilities when I could only do the opposite. Lastly, I would like to thank the community agencies who were supportive of this endeavour and agreed to promote my research project by putting up my recruitment poster.
Post Defense Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. Scharie Tavcer for graciously agreeing to serve as my external examiner. Your feedback in the final stages of this process were invaluable and strengthened the overall quality of my thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. André Magnan for serving as the chair at my thesis defense.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of Dorothy Deringer. Her radiant spirit, courageous nature, and endless strength have inspired many and brightened the lives of countless others.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Extensive work has been put forth to further the discourse on the impact of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal populations in Canada (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Elias, Mignon, Hall, Hong, Hart, & Sareen, 2012; Gagné, 1998; Miller, 1996; Miller, 2003; Perez, 2009; Robertson, 2006). Researchers have also devoted significant time and resources to the study of domestic violence in today’s society, past and present (Artz, 2011; Bennett, 1995; Brookoff, O’Brien, Cook, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Brownridge, 2008; Kiyoshk, 2003; People, 2005). To date, there is an apparent lack of empirical evidence to explore intergenerational trauma as a risk factor for domestic violence (Brownridge, 2003). This gap in literature presents a unique opportunity in which to conduct exploratory research in order to expand discourse on the aforementioned relationship. This thesis addresses the aforementioned gap by examining the lived experiences of First Nations women in Regina, Saskatchewan who have a prior personal, familial or caregiver connection to the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) in Canada and who have been a previous victim of domestic violence.

Definition of Aboriginal Identity

Statistics Canada (2013) defines Aboriginal identity as individuals “who reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit), and/or those who reported Registered or Treaty Indian status, that is registered under the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported membership in a First Nation or Indian Band.” For purposes of this research project, the researcher will only be considering the experiences of Aboriginal women in Regina, Saskatchewan.
Indian Residential School System

The detrimental combination of colonialism, racism, and white privilege has played a role in the assimilation and cultural oppression of Aboriginal people. In particular, the IRSS in Canada, officially in operation from 1892 to 1996, signifies a key injustice in Canadian history (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Miller, 1996). Originating from arrangements between the Canadian Government and various church organizations, residential schools were conceptualized as a tool in the assimilation of Aboriginal people into Western society (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005).

The physical, sexual, and emotional abuses experienced in the Residential School System have been referred to as part of a “sad chapter” in Canadian History (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008). The aforementioned abuses represent some of the most significant human rights violations in the world (Amnesty International, 2004; Amnesty International 2009). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has highlighted the extent of this abuse, detailing the “great transformation from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized’ as violent” (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 353). In 1969, the federal government initiated the closure of the IRSS and in 1996, the last residential school, on Punnichy First Nation in Saskatchewan, closed its doors (Canadian Plains Research Center, 1996; Miller, 1996; Miller, 2003).

Today, one of the effects of this abuse have manifested in the form of intergenerational trauma which subsequently has been argued as contributing to addiction, poverty, mental health issues, and domestic violence among Canada’s Aboriginal people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010; Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Blair, 2005; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman,
2009; Menzies, 2010). The Federal Government of Canada reports that there are over 12,000 individual IRSS claimants and estimates that this number will eventually total 18,000 (Miller, 2003). The inception and maintenance of the IRSS in Canada has created, and continues to contribute to, the ongoing experience of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal populations.

*Intergenerational Trauma*

Intergenerational trauma is defined as the cascading effects of a previous unresolved trauma on subsequent generations (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Danieli, 1998; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). Furthermore, studies have shown that the cultural assimilation efforts of the IRSS have contributed to the poor well-being of many members of the Aboriginal population (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). Menzies (2008) contended that the larger Aboriginal community has been left without the adequate resources, such as counselling, community resources, and support groups, to address the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma effectively. One observed consequence arising from the aforementioned lack of resources is a high rate of violence in Aboriginal communities. In Canada, Aboriginal people represent approximately 3.8% of the population for a total of 1,172,785 individuals (Brownridge, 2008; Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, 2006); however, statistics reveal that Aboriginal peoples are dramatically overrepresented as victims of violence (Brownridge, 2003; Johnson 2006). In addition, when surveyed regarding the health of their communities, the majority of Aboriginal women from Manitoba and Saskatchewan agreed that family and intimate partner violence were a top concern (Brownridge, 2008).
Violence in the home, whether against the child, between family members, or other members of the community, is often a consequence of intergenerational trauma (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011; Kiyoshk, 2003; Robertson, 2006). In particular, studies have concluded that the transmission of intergenerational trauma from one generation to the next has “undermined parenting skills and the capacity to provide a healthy environment for children” (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011, p. 379). Inadequate parenting skills have been causally linked to the presence of addiction, mental health concerns, a lack of positive role models, biological conditions resulting from trauma, or a combination of the preceding factors (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011). Additionally, Aboriginal women who had attended a residential school stated they often encountered difficulty in parenting because they had been deprived of a parental role model as a child (Stout & Peters, 2011). As such, if an individual was consistently exposed to violence throughout their childhood, it becomes much more likely that they will repeat this behaviour as an adult and pass this tendency on to their offspring; creating a pattern of intergenerational violence (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009).

**Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is defined as any form of physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial abuse exerted by one partner over the other to demonstrate power, control, and dominance (Mullender, 1997). Data analyzed from the 2009 General Social Survey revealed that 6% of Canadians experienced physical or sexual abuse by a current or previous spouse (Statistics Canada, 2009). More specifically, the city of Regina, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of police-reported intimate partner violence per capita (McInturff, 2014, p. 31). There are over a thousand incidents of sexual and domestic
violence in Regina each year (McInturff, 2014). However, this number is only an estimate of the levels of violence in Regina as the majority of sexual (90%) and domestic violence (70%) incidents go unreported (McInturff, 2014, p. 31).

Aboriginal women experience domestic violence at a significantly higher rate than their non-Aboriginal counterparts due to the intersectionality of their oppressions (Brownridge, 2003; Rennison, 2001; Trainor & Mihorean, 2001). Intersectionality has been defined as individuals who have “multiple memberships in disadvantaged categories who are in jeopardy of experiencing double, triple, or more forms of discrimination simultaneously” (Hier, 2009, p. 76). Brownridge (2008, p. 355), in his comparison of two nationally representative surveys in Canada, found Aboriginal women had five times the rate of violent victimization in an intimate partner relationship in the previous year and “four times that rate of violent victimization in the previous five years.”

Furthermore, the Canadian Council on Social Development and Native Women’s Association of Canada (1991) determined that it is an exception rather than the rule to know an Aboriginal woman who has not been a victim of domestic violence. Shepard, O’Neill, and Guenette (2006) determined that Aboriginal women have higher mortality rates due to violence as compared to non-Aboriginal women. This tendency is often exacerbated in Aboriginal populations where women are geographically isolated on reserves and often have few supports to reach out to for assistance (Blair, 2005).

Domestic violence is abuse that most often occurs in the private sphere of society (Newman & Yeates, 2008). Often, women are ashamed of their situation and will rationalize, justify, and make excuses for their partner’s behaviour (Newman & Yeates, 2008). In 1979, Lenore Walker introduced the Cycle of Violence to explain this common
pattern in intimate partner relationships. Walker (1979) contended that domestic violence typically follows a cyclical pattern comprised of three main phases: tension building, violent outburst, and the honeymoon phase. Finally, empirical research has determined that victims of domestic violence normalize, rationalize, and justify the behaviours of their abusive partner (Wood, 2001). May and Finch (2009) presented one understanding for the aforementioned behaviour in their introduction of Normalization Process Theory. This theory contends that human interaction and routine are shaped and subsequently reinforced by a complex network of personal and group facts (May & Finch, 2009).

The theories proposed by Walker (1979) and May and Finch (2009) were selected on the basis of their applicability to the relevant themes in this research project. Walker’s (1979) Cycle of Violence can be used to understand the complex dynamics of intimate partner violence and the pattern that the abuse follows. May and Finch’s (2009) Normalization Process Theory is useful in explaining how certain behaviours become acceptable and commonplace practices in people’s life. In chapter five, the two theories will be examined in relation to the salient themes of this research project and used as a lens through which to further understand the relationships between the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and domestic violence.

Research Questions

The following questions have been determined based on the relevant literature and research goals. Intergenerational trauma is an identified consequence of the IRSS. As such, this research project will be looking at intergenerational trauma within the context of domestic violence.
1. What is the relationship between personal, familial or caregiver attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada and domestic violence against Aboriginal women in Regina, Saskatchewan?

2. Does intergenerational trauma, associated with attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada, contribute to the normalization of domestic violence for Aboriginal women in Regina, Saskatchewan?

**Purpose of Research**

The goal of this research project was to garner an understanding of the effect of personal, familial, or caregiver attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada and the subsequent normalization of domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship from the perspective of the participants. Through interviews, the researcher examined the proposed relationship between the appropriate antecedents.

**Significance of the Study**

The aforementioned evidence identified a need for social science research to examine the risk factors associated with domestic violence, particularly the legacy of the IRSS, which contribute to the perpetration of domestic violence on Aboriginal women. The importance of this study is to assist in understanding the relationship between the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and normalizing domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship. Literature on the IRSS in Canada has largely focussed on the relationship between intergenerational trauma and addictions, socioeconomic status, low literacy levels, and unemployment. This research will lend to a more comprehensive understanding of the cascading implications of the IRSS in Canada as they pertain to victims of domestic violence. This understanding will lend to a greater understanding of
the previous traumas and current barriers facing Aboriginal women. As a result, this may also impact the way in which service providers, particularly crisis shelters, victim services programs, and counselling agencies, work with this demographic.

There also exists a need to understand and work to reduce the alarming rates of violence against Aboriginal women (Brownridge, 2003; Johnson, 2006; People, 2005; Robertson, 2006). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2014) reported a total of 164 missing Aboriginal females and 1,017 murdered Aboriginal females between 1980 and 2012. In Saskatchewan, a joint research committee found that 60 percent of missing women in the province were Indigenous even though Indigenous women made up six percent of the population in Canada (Amnesty International, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the underlying causes that contribute to violence against Aboriginal women. The results of the research may inform advocacy projects and future research ventures intended to combat this burgeoning social issue.

Researcher Position

The researcher has four years of experience providing support to victims of domestic and familial violence through employment at the Domestic Violence Unit at Family Service Regina. Hearing the stories of abuse, seeing the effects on the family unit, and the barriers faced by victims of domestic violence has impacted the writer on a personal level. As such, the writer is motivated to better understand domestic violence and work towards solutions to rectify this issue.

This awareness enabled the researcher to approach the interviews from a sensitive and compassionate perspective. The researcher has a comprehensive understanding of the unique dynamics at play in an abusive relationship and is nuanced in building rapport.
with the aforementioned population. The researcher has substantial experience dealing with crisis situations and suicidal clients. In addition, the researcher is familiar with and has made numerous referrals to community agencies based on client needs. The researcher is trained in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST), Motivational Interviewing (MI), the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), and SIAST Victim Services Certification Training which lends to an enhanced understanding of the aforementioned relationship. The researcher has read numerous literatures detailing the effects of Indian Residential Schools, traditional Aboriginal practices, and current programs in place for Aboriginal peoples. Finally, the researcher has participated in Medicine Wheel Training and has successfully completed Cultural Sensitivity Training. Additionally, the researcher has planned culturally sensitive material for the Domestic Violence Drop-In Group at Family Service Regina and has worked closely with the Cultural Coordinator at the Paul Dojack Youth Centre, Phil Anaquod.

The researcher acknowledges that the aforementioned experience could affect the interview process. The researcher may encounter difficulty in separating interview questions from the tendency to provide support to victims of domestic violence. It was a realistic possibility that clients previously or currently enrolled on the researcher’s caseload could participate in the interview process\(^1\). As such, the researcher was cognizant to not pressure these individuals to participate in the interview, but rather, encouraged inclusion in the process only if the individual is willing.

\(^{1}\) None of the participants in this research project were on the researcher’s caseload at any point in time.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter one provided the context for the research project as well as a brief introduction to the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and domestic violence. Additionally, the research questions, purpose of research, and significance of the study were presented to provide the reader with an understanding of the reasons for this research. Chapter two explores the aforementioned topics in greater detail. The second chapter opens with a discussion of Aboriginal colonization in Canada and the IRSS. This dialogue transitions into a discussion of intergenerational trauma and its cascading effects. A discussion of domestic violence then follows which focuses on the types of domestic violence, dynamics in an abusive relationship, and the differential experience of domestic violence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. The last portion of chapter two focuses on theory, namely the Cycle of Violence and Normalization Process Theory.

History of Aboriginal Colonization in Canada

Throughout Canadian history, assimilation practices including colonization initiatives and, in particular, the IRSS have served to marginalize the Aboriginal population and suppress their culture. A non-traditional hierarchy for decision-making processes existed within Aboriginal settlements (Menzies, 2010). This included a holistic philosophy which incorporated “unwritten customary laws, traditions, practices learned through example and the oral teachings of Tribal Elders” (Melton, 2005, p. 13). In 1876, Parliament introduced the Indian Act (the Act) and designated the federal government as the “guardian” of Aboriginal people in Canada (Menzies, 2010, p. 65). The Act divided Aboriginal individuals and families into settlements on an arbitrary basis by authorities external and foreign to this population (Menzies, 2010). As such, the Royal Commission
on Aboriginal People maintained that this process gave non-Aboriginals the power to dictate the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples (Government of Canada, 1996). The combined effects of subordination, systemic marginalization, and disempowerment have led to feelings of disconnection within the larger Aboriginal population (Brant, 1990). Moreover, empirical studies have outlined a correlation between the imposition of contradicting European power structures on Aboriginal populations and the resulting substance abuse, violent behavior, poverty, and mental health concerns (Menzies, 2013; Weaver, 2009).

A historical timeline of the IRSS in Canada begins with a shift of emphasis from interracial cooperation to diplomacy and military alliance (Miller, 1996). The War of 1812 proved to be a catalyst in the relationship between Aboriginal people and to the colonizers of Canada. Miller (1996, p. 62) contended that the “end of the War of 1812 marked the termination of the special military relationship between indigenous peoples and the aggressive intruders in the eastern half of the continent.” Following the War of 1812, large volumes of British immigrants began to come to North America in the 1820s (Miller, 1996). The Euro-Canadian churches, government, and people believed that they were superior to Aboriginal peoples and, as such, felt that their ideals and belief systems should be thrust upon the inferior group (Miller, 1996). Rupert Ross (2003, p. 142) phrased this line of thinking as “all things Aboriginal are inferior at best and dangerous at worst.” Inevitably, the end of this relationship meant that Aboriginal people no longer served a vital purpose in the pursuit of non-Aboriginal ambitions in North America (Miller, 1996). It logically followed that jurisdiction of Indian Affairs was moved from military to civil authorities in 1830 (Miller, 1996). Tragically, this shift meant that
Aboriginal affairs were handled by yet another unsympathetic and insensitive political body (Miller, 1996).

The Orillia Conference of 1846 represented the end of the collaborative relationship between the Britannic state and Aboriginal peoples (Miller, 1996). After this point, Aboriginal people were no longer part of negotiations or considered stakeholders in issues that directly affected their livelihood. In 1807, during negotiations towards the seven numbered treaties, many Aboriginal leaders expressed a need for assistance and education to help their people (Miller, 2003). Chief Paulus Clause of the Bay of Quinte Mohawk stated that, “[education is] our only hope to prevent our race from perishing, and to enable us to stand on the same ground as the white man” (Miller, 1996, p. 81). As a result, “all of the numbered treaties contained a clause that committed the Crown to provide ‘schools on reserves’ or at least teachers for future reserve communities” (Miller, 2003, p. 361). In exchange for this guarantee, Aboriginal leaders were required to contribute one fourth of their annuities received from the government for a period of twenty-five years (Miller, 1996). However, missionary teachers vehemently opposed day schools and deemed them ineffective in the process of cultural assimilation (Miller, 1996). As a result, the federal government went on to implement a policy contrary to that negotiated during treaty talks (Miller, 1996). The aforementioned policy was a deliberate and purposeful effort “designed to eradicate all traces of Indianness” from the Aboriginal population (Grant, 1996, p. 273).
Indian Residential School System

Establishment of Indian Residential Schools in Canada

Various missionary groups and the government worked together to establish the IRSS across Canada. The inception of the first residential schools can be credited to the French colonial period (Miller, 2003). Ultimately, these first schools proved unsuccessful and Europeans in New France felt it unnecessary to further insert themselves into Aboriginal schooling initiatives (Miller, 2003). The next attempt to establish IRSS came at the end of the eighteenth century in New Brunswick with the creation of the Indian College at Sussex Vale (Miller, 2003). Later investigation and review of school procedures exposed the many deficiencies of the Indian College and, as a result, the school was shut down. In 1820, John West, a missionary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society, launched the next residential school in the community of Red River (Miller, 2003).

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, the IRSS initiative had reached Ontario. More specifically, the Mohawk Institute, Canada’s longest running residential school, was set up in 1831 and was ready to take in students by 1834 (Miller, 2003). Miller (2003, p. 360) articulated what he termed the “prehistoric period” of residential schools established in the 1870s, including the Shingwauk Home and the Wawanosh Home. In 1953, the IRSS reached a peak in enrollment with a total of 11,000 students attending the 80 operating schools in Canada (Johnston, 1988, p. 17).
Saskatchewan was home to a total of 22 residential schools (Canadian Plains Research Center, 2006). George Caldwell conducted a study of nine residential schools in Saskatchewan for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1967. The Department of Indian Affairs owned and maintained residential schools in Saskatchewan and made operational decisions through consultation between the branch and religious sectors (Caldwell, 1967). Caldwell (1967, p. 64) determined that of the 1612 children attending these particular schools, 912 were there for child welfare needs while only 639 were attending for educational purposes. Additionally, he concluded that a portion of the children admitted were emotionally disturbed (26), mentally retarded (21), and delinquent (14) (Caldwell, 1967, p. 64). The IRSS was found to be a mechanism of isolation as it worked to separate Aboriginal youth from their traditional communities thereby increasing the likelihood of assimilation (Caldwell, 1967). The schools were based largely on a “white, Christian-oriented value system” which consequently forced Aboriginal youth to make considerable adaptations from their own culture (Caldwell, 1967, p. 93).

Curriculum in the IRSS

The IRSS, fuelled by racism and supremacist thought, served as a savage machine of cultural assimilation that ultimately contributed to identity crisis and subsequent intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal peoples. In 1967, George Caldwell undertook a comprehensive study of nine Indian Residential Schools in Saskatchewan. Caldwell

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2 The nine residential schools studied are as follows: Crowstand Indian Residential School (Kamsack), St. Anthony’s Indian Residential School (Onion Lake), Prince Albert Indian Residential School (Prince Albert), Gordon Indian Residential School (Punnichy), Beauval Indian Residential School (Beauval), Qu’Appelle Indian Residential School (Lebret), Muscowequan Indian Residential School (Lestock), St. Michael’s Indian Residential School (Duck Lake), and Cowessess Indian Residential School (Mareieval).
(1967, p. 2-3) found that the schools were commonly viewed as “mission centers, education centers, child welfare centers” or a varied combination of the three. The guiding policy of the IRSS had been one of assimilation whereby the objective was to integrate the Indian child into the existing educational system in Saskatchewan (Caldwell, 1967). As such, the IRSS adhered to the provincial curriculum which was monitored by the provincial Department of Education (Caldwell, 1967; Legacy of Hope Foundation, n.d.). Caldwell noted a strong religious focus in the schools which were premised on “white, Christian-oriented value system” (Caldwell, 1967, p. 93). The program was designed to be primarily educational with a small amount of time allocated for vocational initiatives such as woodworking and home economics (Caldwell, 1967). Finally, the IRSS in Saskatchewan focused on enhancing the English skills of the Aboriginal students (Caldwell, 1967).

*Abuse in Indian Residential Schools*

Children entering the IRSS were required to undergo a “rigorous cleaning process” that often involved wearing Euro-Canadian clothing and cutting hair short (Miller, 2003, p. 368). A more specific statement described the atmosphere of residential schools as one of “considerable stress, fatigue and anxiety” which likely contributed to the staff’s ignorance to the children’s needs, both physical and emotional (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 43).

The extent of physical abuse in residential schools is described by Agent D.L. Clink in 1896, “such brutality should not be tolerated and would not be tolerated in a white school for a single day in any part of Canada” (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 43). Principals and staff members were free to act as they pleased given that there was
not a system of checks and balances in place to effectively monitor, investigate, or punish those individuals who chose to use violence on students (Government of Canada, 1996). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples noted widespread abuse in the IRSS as well as high death rates from tuberculosis and “overcrowding, lack of care, cleanliness, and poor sanitation” (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 334).

Miller (1996, p. 423) asserts that both young boys and girls were subject to the “sexual appetites” of male staff members. Church organizations failed to screen out sexual predators and ultimately failed to prevent the entry of additional others (Miller, 1996). Sexual abuse was not limited to unwanted contact between staff members and students, Miller (1996, p. 423) also identified that sexual abuse occurred at the “hands of other residential schools students.”

Emotional abuse, in the form of psychological blows and emotional depravation, proved to be the “most prevalent form and indeed the nearly universal form” of abuse in residential schools (Miller, 2003, p. 376). Miller (1996) describes the environment of residential schools as one devoid of emotional support, personal connections, and positive role models. Moreover, a number of former students have expressed that the aforementioned neglect was exacerbated by the fact that they were removed from their families and were unable to communicate with siblings residing at the same institution (Miller, 1996). Consequently, many students, desperate to escape the psychological confines of the IRSS, chose to run away.

In 1920, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, spoke of eliminating the “Indian problem” through use of the IRSS (Erasmus, 2004, p. 3). Scott indicated that his goal was to eliminate traditional Aboriginal
languages, religion, and values and to “absorb” this group into the larger political body (Erasmus, 2004, p. 3). The abuses occurring within the IRSS were prompted by an underlying systemic motive to eradicate Aboriginal ways from Canadian society.

Closure of Indian Residential Schools

The operation of the IRSS from 1880 to 1969 was relatively static, failing to change to meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal students in a rapidly changing society (Miller, 2003). Unsurprisingly, the IRSS initiative failed to produce change in terms of assimilation, evangelization, and economic independence. In 1856, a colonial commission of inquiry revealed varied results concerning the living conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada (Miller, 1996). The Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs concluded that “up to half of residential school students did not live to benefit from their school experience” (Miller, 2003, p. 375). As a result, Governor Simpson argued that the IRSS did not meet their set objectives and served to estrange Aboriginal communities (Miller, 1996).

By the early twentieth century, the Department of Indian Affairs was aware of the aforementioned failures and would have initiated the closure of the IRSS had it not been for the involvement of the church (Miller, 2003). The government could not convince Church partners to end the IRSS initiative and as such, these institutions continued to exist for several more decades (Miller, 2003). Finally, in 1969, the federal government formally withdrew from the IRSS initiative and decided to initiate the closure of residential schools (Miller, 1996; 2003). At this point, transfer of control over the residential schools began to shift to the Indian bands (Legacy of Hope Foundation, n.d.). In Saskatchewan, the last federally run school closed its doors in 1983. However, seven
schools remained in operation throughout the 1980s (Canadian Plains Research Center, 2006). The last Indian Residential School in Canada, Gordon Indian Residential School on Punnichy First Nation, Saskatchewan, closed in 1996 (Canadian Plains Research Center, 1996). For nearly a century, this destructive system of assimilation and ethnocentrism was enforced and attempted to strip Aboriginal people of their culture, beliefs, and traditions. In the early 1990s, Canadians started to hear stories of the abuse and neglect in residential schools (Miller, 2003). These grievances where noted in the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 (Miller, 2003). The IRSS in Canada has served as one of the most detrimental catalysts in the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Miller, 1996).

Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement


The federal government initiated a reconciliation strategy in January 1998 with the introduction of Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005). The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement
(IRSSA) was introduced in 2006 with the goal of recognizing the effects of the IRSS and making financial reparation (Green, 2012). The IRSSA was finalized in 2007 and is the largest class-action settlement in Canadian History (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2009). As part of the IRSSA, the Common Experience payment allocated $10,000 to compensate each claimant for the initial year spent in a residential school and $3,000 for each additional year after that (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2009). Additionally, the IRSSA designated $20 million for commemorative initiatives to honour residential school survivors (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2009).

As part of this reconciliation effort, Former Prime Minister Harper issued a formal apology on behalf of the nation in 2008, and a $350 million “healing fund” was set up with the intention of rectifying the harms caused by the IRSS (Miller, 2003, p. 381). As noted by Woolford (2014, p. 131), while the 2008 apology “went further than previous governments in acknowledging the harms of the residential schools… survivors giving testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada have in large part expressed a healthy degree of skepticism with respect to the apology.” In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established with the intention of hearing personal accounts of the IRSS experience and thereby providing a public record of the tragic events that transpired (Snyder, 2010). The TRC’s focus was to “revitalize the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society” with the ultimate goal being reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, n.d.). Woolford (2014) and James (2012) have criticized the TRC for protecting perpetrators
and disguising the full extent of the IRSS. For this reason, they maintain that the TRC has fallen short of what survivors had hoped for (James, 2012; Woolford, 2014).

In 2015, the TRC released a document entitled, *Truth and Reconciliation of Canada: Calls to Action*, which garnered national and international attention. This document listed 94 recommendations to “redress the legacy of residential schools and to advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 1). Now that the *Calls to Action* have been released there is a renewed hope for increased action in addressing the harms of the IRSS (Fedio, 2015). In July 2015, Canada’s Premiers acknowledged the harms of the IRSS and expressed their commitment to action (Council of the Federal Secretariat, 2015). Educational curriculum, leadership initiatives, and the governmental use of a “lens that promotes respect and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” were included in the provincial response to the TRC’s *Calls to Action* (Council of the Federal Secretariat, 2015).

However, at this point, there has been a limited federal response to this document (Fedio, 2015). Former Prime Minister Harper has indicated that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will not be implemented despite the specific recommendation from the TRC (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2015).

It is important to note the political climate in which the aforementioned actions have taken place. In 2008, Former Prime Minister Harper’s formal apology was issued as part of a reconciliation effort intended to “move the nation forward” from the occurrence of the IRSS in Canada (Stewart, 2011, p. 53). However, a year later, after his re-election, Former Prime Minister Harper refused to accept the notion that the IRSS was a tool of assimilation used against Aboriginal people (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network,
2015). Within this context, it appears as though the 2008 apology was crafted to serve a political purpose during an election year. The federal government’s previous inaction demonstrates a disregard of Aboriginal issues and a lack of commitment towards working to improve the quality of life in this population.

In October 2015, Justin Trudeau was elected as the new Prime Minister of Canada. With his leadership has come a renewed commitment to strengthening the relationship between the government and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. In his address to First Nations leaders in Gatineau, Quebec, Trudeau stated that, “it is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations peoples, one that understands that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of First Nations in Canada are not an inconvenience but rather a sacred obligation” (Mas, 2015). As part of this address, Trudeau outlined a five-point plan, including an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, to rectify the aforementioned relationship (Mas, 2015). In speaking about the inquiry, Trudeau indicated that, “this inquiry [is] a priority for our government because those touched by this national tragedy have waited long enough. The victims deserve justice, their families an opportunity to be heard and to heal” (Mas, 2015). The first phase of the inquiry, consultation with victims, family, aboriginal organizations, and front line workers is set to begin in December 2015 with the second phase commencing in spring 2015 (Mas, 2015).

In December 2015, the TRC released its final report. Trudeau advised that the Government of Canada would work with leaders in the Aboriginal community and involved parties in the IRSSA to design a “national engagement strategy for developing
and implementing a national reconciliation framework, including a formal response to the TRC’s *Calls to Actions*” (Galloway, 2015).

**Intergenerational Trauma**

Intergenerational trauma is defined as the subsequent effects of unresolved trauma on various parties including individuals, families, intimate partners, the larger community, and between generations (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). Danieli (1998, p. 351) stated that intergenerational trauma is characterized by a “pervasive and generalized anger” that is caused by a massive trauma and is passed on to subsequent generations. Studies have shown that unresolved trauma in one generation can have a negative cascading effect in terms of behavioural, psychological, and environment aspects of later generations (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2005) contended that if trauma is not handled properly it will continue to affect future generations, creating a cyclical pattern of abuse.

Colonialism and the IRSS have been labeled as integral and destructive components in the unfortunate cycle of intergenerational trauma as experienced by Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Gagne, 1998; Menzies, 2010). Today, the consequences of the aforementioned social policies can be observed in the succeeding generations of those individuals directly affected (Menzies, 2010). Gagné (1998) contended that at least two generations, namely grandparents and parents, were destroyed by way of direct assimilationist practice. More specifically, Duran and Duran (1995) listed substance abuse, child welfare issues, suicide, and intimate partner violence as factors resulting from intergenerational trauma and contributing to the devastation in
Aboriginal communities. As such, the observable poor well-being\(^3\) of many members of the Aboriginal population in Canada can be attributed to the effects of intergenerational trauma, current events, or a combination of the two (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009).

*Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma*

Menzies (2009), based on his research on homelessness in Aboriginal populations, has found that intergenerational trauma is passed on behaviorally to younger generations. Similarly, Day, Jones, Nakata, and McDermott (2012) contended that collective group memories and shared experiences are also transmitted in instances where affected individuals do not have an appropriate outlet to effectively deal with their traumatic experiences. The unfortunate culmination of shared group trauma and individual events become an integral component of Aboriginal “social relations, practices, and institutions” (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000, p. 611). Empirical research has found that intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal populations has been caused by a series of traumatic events (e.g., colonialism, the IRSS) that have taken place over a significant period of time (Braveheart, 1999; Duran & Duran, 1995; Elias, Mignon, Hall, Hong, Hart, & Sareen, 2012; Gagné, 1998; Menzies, 2009).

*Effects Today*

*Poverty*

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2010) reported that nearly one-in-four Aboriginal families are lone-parent families, often transient in nature and of low socio-economic status. Health Canada (1999) found that 32% of Aboriginal children

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\(^3\) Poor well-being can include, but is not limited to, the following characteristics: low socio-economic status, low literacy levels, high levels of drug and alcohol addictions, transiency, unemployment (Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development, 2010).
under the age of 15 lived in a single-parent family which is double the rate of the general population. The explanation for the aforementioned statistic is not that single mothers do an inferior job of parenting but rather that “women fare far worse economically than men after a divorce” (Alvi, 2012, p. 39). Moreover, the transient nature of nearly 25% of the Aboriginal population often serves as a metaphorical roadblock, preventing individuals from accessing education, employment training, and housing (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010). A 2006 survey conducted by the City of Toronto indicated that 26% of homeless individuals in the city were of Aboriginal ancestry even though this group comprised a mere 0.4% of the total population. Further to this, research has shown that a total of 90% of sex trade workers are Aboriginal (Kingsley & Mark, 2000). An additional study found that the rate of incarceration for Aboriginal men is 11 times greater than that of non-Aboriginal men (Chansonneuve, 2005). Implicit in these numbers is a disparity in today’s society whereby Aboriginal peoples experience the aforementioned difficulties at a higher rate than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Menzies, 2013). Social inequality, defined as “those forms of inequality which are allocated on the basis of group membership or position in the social organization of society,” can explain why Aboriginal populations are automatically at a disadvantage (Rubinstein, 2001, p. 40).

Mental Health

The collective and individual mental health of Aboriginal peoples has been damaged both historically and presently through relations with the Canadian government (Menzies, 2010). Day and colleagues (2012) contended that the grief resulting from colonialism and assimilation practices is a common denominator in mental illness as
experienced by the aforementioned population. This is evidenced in a staggering 64% of Aboriginal IRSS survivors who have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in addition to numerous other mental illnesses and physical ailments (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). Moreover, statistics indicate that suicide and depression rates are significantly higher in Aboriginal populations than in the rest of the general population (Health Canada, 2000). Here, it is important to note that mental illnesses do not occur in isolation from one another. Rather, the prevalence of concurrent disorders has been reported to be as high as 70% within certain communities (Menzies, 2010).

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse has been noted as a “primary trigger” for violence by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence (1999, p. 16). Riger, Bennett, and Sigurvinsdottir (2014, p. 1), in their study of therapeutic court treatment options, noted that substance abuse was a common factor in 50% of domestic incidents. In these situations, both the victim and the perpetrator reported significant levels of substance abuse (Kilpatrick, Acierno, Resnick, Saunders, & Best, 1997; Roberts, Lawrence, O’Toole, & Raphael, 1997). The co-occurrence of substance abuse and domestic violence can compound the frequency and severity of abuse in the relationship and may also lead to a reciprocal relationship between the two aforementioned factors (Easton, Mandel, Hunkele, Nich, Rounsaville, & Carroll, 2007; Kilpatrick, et al., 1997). Furthermore, Pan, Neidig, and O’Leary (1994) articulated that alcohol abuse by the perpetrator can increase the severity of physical violence in a domestic relationship by 128%. Lastly, the presence of substance abuse in domestic
situations can increase the possibility of current and future assault (Forjuoh, Coben, & Gondolf, 1998).

Studies have shown that some individuals may use substances as a way of coping with trauma (McEvoy & Danilyk, 1995; Millar & Stermac, 2000; Stout & Peters, 2011; Ullman, Relyea, Peter-Hagene, & Vasquez, 2013). A study of the effects of sexual abuse in the IRSS demonstrated a correlation between childhood trauma and substance abuse in adult life (McEvoy & Daniluk, 1995). In some instances, individuals would use substances and/or alcohol to “protect themselves from the pain” they associated with their IRSS experience (McEvoy & Daniluk, 1995, p. 231). Millar and Stermac (2000, p. 175) found that some individuals use substances as way to control their situation by introducing an “interpretable and understandable” form of pain. A significant number of former IRSS students suffer from PTSD (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Stout & Peters, 2011). As such, research has uncovered a co-morbidity of PTSD and substance abuse/drinking problems (Ullman, et al., 2013). Finally, Filipas and Ullman (2006) determined that a reciprocal relationship exists between substance abuse and victimization whereby the participation in one can increase the negative effects of another. As evidenced above, Aboriginal people and the larger community experience complex and multifaceted issues as a consequence of intergenerational trauma.

Loss of Culture

Assimilation efforts in Canada, particularly through the vehicle of the IRSS, attempted to destroy Aboriginal culture. The result of the assimilation project has been the weakening of the role of culture in Aboriginal communities (Menzies, 2010). Morriseau (1998) contended that public policy has weakened the balance between the
four elements of the traditional medicine wheel. Solanto (2010) has had extensive involvement with Aboriginal people and communities experiencing intergenerational trauma through his work on grief, addictions, and mental health issues. As such, his research found that Aboriginal peoples exist as a collective entity comprised of a myriad of “complex and dynamic relationships” (Solanto, 2010, p. 2). However, the aforementioned connections were condemned and subsequently severed with the imposition of European culture (Menzies, 2013). Furthermore, as Aboriginal peoples were introduced to European practices they gradually began to view their own traditional ways in a negative light (Weaver, 2009). The culmination of these detrimental components have left many Aboriginal families, communities, and the larger nation without the proper skills to actively participate in today’s society (Menzies, 2013). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that former students had difficulty moving on, struggled to adjust to modern society, and often found themselves in trouble with the law (Government of Canada, 1996, p. 52).

The IRSS has been referred to as an “engine of cultural oppression” (Miller, 1996, p. 42). Consequently, many IRSS survivors suffer from the effects of being stripped of their culture and traditional practices (Ross, 2003). The IRSS did not adequately prepare Aboriginal students for adult life (Miller, 2003). More specifically, the system neglected to impart lessons on pro-social choices, emotional coping, and appropriate conduct in relationships (Miller, 2003). Ross (2003, p. 143) captured this struggle in posing the following questions: “and what happens when you are told, from every direction and in every way, that you and all your people have no value to anyone, no purpose to your lives, no positive impact on the world around you?” Today, unresolved traumas from the
IRSS have manifested in the form of cascading intergenerational trauma (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005). The very nature of this trauma implies that subsequent generations are impacted by the initial trauma, that being the IRSS (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009).

The implications of intergenerational trauma are evident in Canada’s Aboriginal population (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Menzies, 2010). Poverty, poor mental health, substance abuse, and loss of culture are all components that have occurred, at least in part, because of the IRSS and the resulting intergenerational trauma (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Menzies, 2010; Miller, 1996). The aforementioned factors, identified as contributing risk factors for domestic violence, may provide an explanation for why abuse occurs in an intimate relationships (Bennett, 1995; Brownridge, 2008; Miller, 2003).

*Structural Violence*

The culmination of economic marginalization and government policy have broken apart Aboriginal families while simultaneously pushing an alarming number of Aboriginal women into at-risk situations (Amnesty International, 2004; Brownridge, 2008; Kiyoshk, 2003; Menzies, 2008; Robertson, 2006). In 1999, the Canadian government admitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee that the “situation of Indigenous peoples is the most pressing human rights issue” in the country (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 20). Empirical research has noted that substance abuse, socioeconomic status, unemployment, family size, and low education levels are all risk factors for violence against Aboriginal women (Bennett, 1995; Brownridge, 2008). The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* has deemed
violence against women as an unfortunate symptom of the historical inequalities between men and women (Amnesty International, 2009). Amnesty International (2004) contends that the specific inequalities between men and women have also created roadblocks for women seeking protection.

More than half of Aboriginal female victims (52%) reported that they feared for their lives as result of spousal violence compared to 31% of non-Aboriginal female victims (Statistics Canada, 2013). These statistics point to a disturbing social pattern whereby Aboriginal women, marginalized through colonization, experience further oppression. Research has consistently found that Aboriginal women in North America have a higher rate of violent victimization, both spousal and non-spousal, compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2013). Aboriginal women are at the greatest risk of becoming victims of domestic violence than any other racial/ethnic group in Canada (Belknap & McDonald, 2010). Implicit in these numbers is the notion that violence is a risk for all women; but that the risk Aboriginal women face is unique in that it is worsened by the presence of racism, discrimination, and social inequality (Amnesty International, 2004; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Kiyoshk, 2003).

Such monstrous acts of violence have gone largely unnoticed due to “unchallenged male privilege” that exists in a patriarchal society (Razack, 1998, p. 58). Oppressed Aboriginal women are unlikely to speak out against these crimes for fear of unpacking a larger cultural debate. Mankiller (2004) argues that Indigenous women do not want to be defined by individuals who are insensitive and unfamiliar with their lived experience. Furthermore, Mankiller finds it especially problematic where white middle class men attempt to define policies and procedures of the criminal justice system (2004).
This practice, she argues, serves to further oppress and marginalize Aboriginal women. Pease (2004, p. 119) offers a comparison of white privilege and Aboriginal subordination in stating that “white men represent the normative dominant subject position on two of the main axes of power.” For these reasons, women of color feel that they are obligated to discuss issues of culture and violence within the framework of white supremacy – a framework which fundamentally denies the intersections of racism and sexism. As a result, the Aboriginal women’s struggle to be heard has been compared to a “prison of isolation” (Canadian Council on Social Development & Native Women’s Association of Canada, 1991, p. 1).

**Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a pertinent social issue perpetuated and often worsened by racism, existing social structures, and gross misconceptions about the nature of this type of abuse (Amnesty International, 2004). Domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence, battering or spousal abuse, is characterized by a variety abuses occurring within the context of an intimate partner relationship (Belknap & McDonald, 2010; Brownridge, 2008; Gosselin, 2014; Kiyoshk, 2003). Gosselin (2014, p. 159) defines intimate partner violence as violence which is committed by a “current or former spouse, opposite-sex cohabitating partner, same-sex cohabitating partner, date, boyfriend or girlfriend.” Therefore, this identifies that domestic violence can be perpetrated by either men and/or women against male and/or female partners. Similarly, DeKeseredy and MacLeod (1997, p. 5) defined domestic violence as the “misuse of power” against an intimate partner resulting in a “loss of dignity, control, and safety.” Researchers have
found that this type of abuse generally takes a variety of forms and is a repeated offence over time (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Gosselin, 2014).

**Types of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and financial abuse. Physical violence includes “punching, shoving, biting, kicking, using a weapon against a partner, throwing items, pulling hair, and restraining the partner” (Gosselin, 2014, p. 159). Cooper (1993) found a relationship between past physical abuse and future, repeated abuse whereby the presence of the latter was predictive of the former.

Sexual violence is characterized by forced sexual acts including rape and unwanted sexual touching (Gosselin, 2014). DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2011, p. 6) contend that women may have sex with their partner out of a “sense of obligation” resulting from their partner’s coercive and threatening nature. However, it is important to note that sexual violence is not limited to acts involving forced penetration and can include unwanted acts while intoxicated or acts carried out under duress (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2011).

Psychological and emotional abuse can include, but is not limited to, threatening, mind games, instilling feelings of powerless and entrapment, intimidation, name calling, micro-regulation of partner’s behaviour, humiliation, and harassment (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Gosselin, 2014; Stark, 2007). Researchers have identified a type of psychological/emotional abuse known as coercive control characterized by “subtle and hard to detect actions” (Kernsmith, 2008, p. 133-134). Examples of coercive control are derogatory remarks, intimidating looks, and threatening gestures (Kernsmith, 2008).
Research has shown that psychological and emotional abuse can be just as injurious, if not more, than physical or sexual abuse (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2011).

Spiritual abuse has been articulated as the “mistreatment of a person who is need of help, support, or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining, or decreasing the person’s spiritual empowerment” (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991, p. 20). This can include isolation from a spiritual community, denying access to religious activities, and manipulation of religious messages (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006). As a result, the aforementioned abuses work to strip victims of a supportive community and negate the positive spiritual messages (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006).

Lastly, financial or economic abuse is defined as any effort or combination of efforts to make an individual financially dependent on another (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2008). This can include stealing money, withholding access to money, coercing the victim to co-sign documents, and perpetrator control over finances (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2011; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2008). In some instances, financial abuse can present a significant barrier to women seeking to leave abusive relationships (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2008).

Typically, the aforementioned abuses occur concurrently with other forms of violence (DeKeseredy & Macleod, 1997; Gosselin, 2014). In other words, the various forms of domestic violence are not mutually exclusive, but rather occur in conjunction with one another (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2011).
In cases of intimate partner violence, the relationship between the victim and the abuser is one characterized by power, control, and coercion. In Aboriginal populations, this tendency is often exacerbated by a lack of socialization between male and female students in the IRSS and their own experience of violence (Miller, 2003). As a result, Aboriginal men and women may be unable to relate to one another in a healthy and constructive manner (Miller, 2003). Research has noted that domestic violence is most often perpetrated by a male partner toward a female partner (Belknap & McDonald, 2010). However, domestic violence can also be initiated by female abusers on to male victims, as well as in same-sex partner relationships. Societal attitudes have deemed domestic violence a private and somewhat taboo matter that is to be resolved between the two parties involved (Belknap & McDonald, 2010; People, 2005). In fact, Walker (1999, p. 24) reported that intervention in “domestic quarrels” is a frowned upon practice in many countries even though it is an empirically proven fact that abusers are unlikely to seek professional help for their issues.

*Cycle of Violence*

Lenore Walker first introduced the Cycle of Violence Theory in 1979 to lend to the understanding of manipulation within the context of intimate partner relationships (Gosselin, 2014). Walker’s (1979) conceptualization is comprised of a three-phase continuum which is dynamic in nature and varied between relationships. The first phase, often referred to as “walking on eggshells” or tension building, is characterized by poor communication, victim compliance, and minimizing (Walker, 1979, p. 55-59). Phase I can last as little as minutes or as long as weeks and comprises the escalation of the abusive partner’s dominance (Walker, 1979). Phase II represents the breaking point for
the abusive partner and typically involves a violent outburst that causes the victim physical and/or psychological harm (Walker, 1979). After the violent outburst, follows the honeymoon phase (Phase III) which is filled with guilt, apology, and loving behaviours such as buying the victim flowers or showering them with affection (Walker, 1979). The cycle may only happen once during a relationship or it can repeat itself multiple times throughout a relationship. Studies have shown that violence often escalates with each repetition of the cycle with the honeymoon period becoming shorter and shorter until it eventually ceases to exist (Walker, 1979). Walker’s description helps to explain why some women may stay in a violent relationship or leave and eventually return to an abusive partner (Gosselin, 2014).

Normalization of Violence

Normalization has been defined as “the work that actors do as they engage in some ensemble of activities (that may be new or changed ways of thinking, acting, and organizing) and by which means it becomes routinely embedded in the matrices of already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices” (May & Finch, 2009, p. 540). Albert Bandura (1973), in his explanation of the Social Learning theory, stated that behaviours deemed as commonplace, may be repeated by other individuals and subsequent generations. This is best exemplified by a child who has grown up in an abusive home and has watched his or her parents solve conflict through the use of aggression (Bandura, 1973). Consequently, this youth will learn that violence is an appropriate and normal means through which conflict can be resolved (Bandura, 1973).

Empirical research has identified that the effects of witnessing violence are similar to those resulting from the direct experience of violence (Cahn, 1991). As such,
Jackson (1996), Kalmuss (1984), LaPrairie (1987), and Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) have ascertained a direct relationship between witnessing or experiencing violence in one’s family of origin and later repeating these patterns in an intimate relationship. Violence in the home has also been positively correlated with the experience of psychological abuse in intimate relationships during adulthood (Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003). Children who witnessed parental hitting are twice as likely to experience “severe marital aggression” as those who did not report the experience of violence in the home (Kalmuss, 1984, p.12). As such, the evidence demonstrates that aggressive and violent behaviours may be passed on to subsequent generations in a general manner (Kwong, et al., 2003).

*Normalization Process Theory*

Normalization Process Theory has been used to understand how certain practices become integral parts of everyday routines and the larger social context (May & Finch, 2009). This ecological theory provides a foundation for analyzing societal relationships, paradigms, and collective beliefs (May & Finch, 2009). Normalization Process Theory assumes that human actions are shaped through a diverse network of personal and group facts (May & Finch, 2009). These interactions occur in tandem with one another and as such, do not occur independently from one another (May & Finch, 2009). This process is initiated by individual and group efforts to introduce and incorporate practices into the collective framework (May & Finch, 2009). Next, the aforementioned practices are permanently embedded in the framework through coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring (May & Finch, 2009). Finally, both the individuals and groups continually monitor the accorded
practices to ensure that the proper incorporation and acceptance of this component takes place (May & Finch, 2009).

Normalization Process Theory can be used to understand how the normalization of violence occurs within Aboriginal populations. The normalization of violence in Aboriginal populations has been exacerbated by the experience of colonialism and the implementation of the IRSS. LaPrairie (1987) contended that the aforementioned factors have had a lasting impact on the structural definitions of gender roles for Aboriginal men and women. Through assimilation efforts, traditional respect and caring were replaced with notions of patriarchy and paternalism with the ultimate consequence being violence against women (Jackson, 1999; McIvor & Nahane, 1998; Turpel, 1993). However, in accordance with the definition previously given, one must be reminded that domestic violence affects both males and females and also individuals in homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Turpel (1993) argued that the Canadian state significantly damaged the traditional Aboriginal family structure and consequently left Aboriginal men in a position where they did not recognize or understand their role in an intimate relationship. Moreover, Turpel (1993) articulated that the aforementioned mechanism of assimilation worked to change the Aboriginal belief system so that women were viewed as inferior. McIvor and Nahane (1998) identified that the normalization of violence in societal institutions has occurred largely due to efforts by the Canadian state, namely, the IRSS.

Normalization of Violence in Intimate Relationships

The normalization of violence can occur in intimate relationships and often involves the victim minimizing or justifying their experience of abuse (Wood, 2001).
The normalization of domestic violence involves the minimization of abuse in the relationship (Dunham & Senn, 2000; Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989). Pirog-Good and Stets (1989) found that women who are more accepting of violence are more likely to minimize their experience when disclosing to friends and/or family and are less likely to seek support. Additionally, a negative relationship was found between the severity of abuse and the amount of information the victim disclosed (Dunham & Senn, 2000). In other words, as the level of violence increases, the amount of detail disclosed to the victim’s friends and/or family decrease.

Wood’s research on victims of domestic violence revealed that some women may normalize their abuse through the use of idealization and story lines. For example, the “prince charming” or “prince of darkness” models state that victims may stay in their relationship because they view their partner’s abusive behaviour as typical of a strong male figure (Wood, 2001, p. 244). Moreover, Sugarman and Frankel (1996) have identified that women who maintain traditional gender roles generally had a higher tolerance for assault from their male partners than did women who held alternative views. The acceptance of this perspective is problematic because it perpetuates the belief that a woman’s self-worth is tied to her according relationship status (Wood, 2001). Consequently, a victim may stay in a destructive relationship for a longer period of time in an effort to satisfy societal standards for intimate partnerships (Wood, 2001). Finally, Del Mar (1996) contended that violence against women will remain commonplace as long as the beliefs that perpetuate it are normal and accepted in today’s society. Logically so, this statement indicates that the normalization of domestic violence in
intimate relationships occurs in part through societal perceptions and stereotypes (Del Mar, 1996).
Chapter 3: Methodology

The previous chapters provided the context as well as a discussion of the extant literature and theoretical foundation upon which this is premised. This chapter begins with a detailed description of qualitative research which is the guiding methodological paradigm for this research project. The ontological and epistemological frameworks are provided, leading into a discussion regarding the chosen method, semi-structured interviews. Next, the identified population, sampling procedures, and participants are outlined. A description of data collection procedures (e.g., consent and confidentiality) are provided and serve as a framework for the interviews. Thematic network analysis is introduced and a discussion of how the data analysis technique was employed is included. Finally, ethical considerations and study limitations are outlined.

Methodological Paradigm–Qualitative Research

The consideration of what constitutes qualitative research is imperative in creating an empirically sound basis on which to ground this research project. Ontology, as defined by Mason (2002, p. 14), is the “nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social reality that one wishes to investigate.” There are different properties of ontology including “peoples, understandings, attitudes, beliefs, views, cultural or social constructions, narratives, behavior” (Mason, 2002, p. 15). An interpretivist approach focuses on the development of social meanings through societal interactions and their subsequent interpretation (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Epistemology focuses on what factors constitute knowledge and evidence of the specific phenomena, social reality, or entity based on the ontological perspective (Mason, 2002, p. 16). The researcher’s epistemology comprises their “theory of knowledge” and
therefore, involves the personal consideration of what “counts” as proof or fact of social properties (Mason, 2002, p. 16). Logically so, the researcher’s epistemology will assist in the production of theories about the overarching ontological parts of society (Mason, 2002). A constructivist epistemology involves the belief that the world is constructed through interactions and interpretations (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Social meanings are formed on the basis of the aforementioned communication and lead individuals to share societal beliefs and subjective facts (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

A consideration of the above factors resulted in the identification of the qualitative research paradigm as the most appropriate approach for answering the research question. This was selected because the lived experiences of the participants are paramount to a comprehensive understanding of how the identified issues affected the specific participants. Qualitative research methods enable researchers to “hear the voices” of oppressed populations and view societal issues from a unique perspective (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 7).

Method

The purpose of an interview is to gather information through a structured or semi-structured question and response form of conversation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The interview method possesses a number of strengths including the ability to acquire detailed information, further probe into topics of interest, and build rapport with the participant (Liamputtong, 2007; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In addition, the qualitative interview method has been commonly employed to study domestic violence and intergenerational trauma (Artz, 2011; Menzies, 2009; Nancarrow, 2006). Through the use of a semi-structured interview the participants can share their lived experience enabling the
researcher to examine their combined stories in an effort to answer the research question. The interviews were inductive in nature, meaning that patterns emerged from the data and served to enhance the current understanding of a social phenomena (Bouma, Ling, & Wilkinson, 2004). An emic orientation focuses on personal accounts, behaviours, and actions of those individuals who are a part of the culture, society, or phenomena being studied (Peterson & Pike, 1954).

Population, Sample, and Participants

This study targeted a specific sample population of Aboriginal women over the age of 18 years in Regina, Saskatchewan previously victimized by domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship. Participants were required to self-identify personal, familial, or caregiver attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada. Additionally, participants were required to self-identify as an Aboriginal person.

Participants for this study were recruited through the use of an informative poster (see Appendix B). The researcher contacted the Regina Transition House, Family Service Regina, Regina Police Service Victim Services, Isabel Johnson Shelter, Wichihik Iskwewak Safe House (WISH), Support of Families in Affliction (SOFIA) House, YWCA My Aunts Place, Circle Project, STOPS to Violence, Al Ritchie Community Association, Catholic Family Services, Regina Sexual Assault Centre, Aboriginal Family Services, and the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and provided each with a Recruitment Letter (see Appendix A) and an overview of the research project and requested their assistance in advertising the project to their clients. Upon agreement to assist the researcher, the researcher provided the agency with paper copies of the recruitment poster.
Additionally, the researcher sought out participants by employing snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is the practice of identifying potential research participants through contact information provided by initial participants (Noy, 2008). This sampling method is most commonly used in qualitative research, research in the social sciences, and in instances where the identified population is hard to reach or “hidden” (Noy, 2008, p. 330). Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) contend that the use of snowball sampling is appropriate in situations where sensitive research participants are involved or where the subject matter is private. Noy (2008, p. 330) notes that the process of snowball sampling can involve repetitive layers and boasts and “accumulative dimension” as participants continue to make referrals to the researcher. However, snowball sampling requires the researcher to give control of the sampling process to their participants who will then make referrals to subsequent informants (Noy, 2008). At this point, the researcher can determine which potential informants, if any, are suitable for participation in the project (Noy, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews, using a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions, were used to acquire the necessary data to complete this research project. Adams (2010) defines semi-structured interviews as a guided conversation whereby the researcher dictates the direction of the interaction to meet an identified outcome. The semi-structured interview is a particularly useful qualitative research tool in instances where the topic of the investigation is sensitive in nature (Adams, 2010). Semi-structured interviews do not involve an exchange of information as a conversation would, but rather, follow a detailed agenda prepared beforehand by the researcher (Adams, 2010). The
researcher must ensure that research topics are covered during the conversation and must also maintain a sensitive method of questioning and listening (Adams, 2010).

Data Collection

A detailed consent form is included in Appendix C and was provided, reviewed, and voluntarily signed by each participant prior to engaging in an interview. The researcher read the consent form verbatim for all participants. Participants had a chance to ask questions about the purpose of the study and the interview process at that time. The consent form provided participants with information about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, as well as how the researcher used the information provided by the participant. Included in the consent form is a space for participants to indicate whether or not they consent to follow-up contact by the researcher if necessary. The researcher had a professional obligation to report the disclosure of a criminal matter or a child protection concern. As such, the researcher cautioned participants to avoid disclosing the aforementioned information during the course of the interview. Additionally, the voluntary signing of the consent form ensured informed participation in the study. Participants provided consent prior to the initial interview and at each subsequent contact to ensure informed participation.

To maintain confidentiality, the researcher did not identify any participant by name in any portion of the research process or final document unless they indicated otherwise. Additionally, any distinguishing information (e.g. addresses, dates, names) was treated with the utmost care to prevent one from identifying the research participants. The nature of snowball sampling makes confidentiality difficult to ensure given that participants were asked to refer prospective participants to the researcher. Audio recorded material
(including transcripts) and notes taken during the interview process were accessible only to the researcher and supervisor, Dr. Nicholas Jones. Upon completion of the research project, interview materials were stored in a secure filing cabinet at the University of Regina for a period of five years. At the end of the five-year storage period, all materials will be destroyed.

**Interview**

The researcher prepared an interview guide to ensure that the interview remained focused on the research questions while still allowing for the exploration of additional avenues of inquiry identified as significant by the participants (see Appendix D). The researcher asked participants a number of open-ended interview questions determined by relevant factors included in the literature review. The researcher indicated that she may request a second interview with participants if new avenues of inquiry arise. During this time, the researcher focused on the frequency and severity of domestic violence, familial attendance in the IRSS, consequences of intergenerational trauma, normalization of violence, and perceptions of violence. Participants were required to self-identify personal or familial/caregiver attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada. Additionally, participants were required to self-identify as Aboriginal.

**Analysis**

An analytic tool for qualitative research, thematic networks, was used to organize the data. Thematic network analysis works to uncover themes at different levels in the text and subsequently structures these concepts in a web-like network (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic network analysis is premised on a six-level structure with three different levels of analysis. The researcher chose this method of data analysis for its
ability to identify salient themes in the data and to draw relationships between varying thematic levels. Additionally, thematic network analysis produces a “web-like illustration” which enhances the reader’s understanding of the research project (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 386).

The first level of analysis involves the reduction or breakdown of text through the coding of material, identification of themes, and the construction of thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The initial step in this phase involves coding the interview material. The researcher began this first step by defining a coding framework based on theoretical interests and key concepts identified in the research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher applied the indicated codes to the interview data to separate the text into meaningful “chunks” (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Step two involves reviewing the text segments and pulling out the most common and significant themes. After completing this step, the researcher was able to identify the underlying patterns in the data and was able to further refine themes. Finally, the information collected during the first two phases of thematic analysis was used to construct the thematic networks. This phase involves six distinct steps the first of which is arranging themes into similar categories (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher organized the coded data to fit within the proposed categories of basic themes, organizing themes, and the global theme. Basic themes are the lowest-order themes and are grouped together to form organizing themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Organizing themes are then compiled to form global themes which are the highest order in thematic network analysis and represent the overarching idea (Attride-Stirling, 2001).
Analysis stage two is focused on the exploration of the text and required a description and exploration of thematic networks followed by a detailed summary of the networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Finally, analysis stage three is concentrated on the integration of exploration and interpreting patterns (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These final two phases involved a detailed examination of the visual web-like illustration detailing the various thematic levels. Upon completion of the organizational phases, the researcher described and explored the thematic networks, summarized the thematic network, and interpreted patterns. Thematic network analysis produces an informative construct which is useful for the researcher during the analysis stage but also for the reader as a tool for understanding the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Ethical Considerations

This research project focused exclusively on a vulnerable population in society, namely Aboriginal females who have previously been victims of domestic violence (Liamputtong, 2007). Moore and Miller (1999) define a vulnerable person as one who encounters decreased levels of autonomy as a direct result of personal factors and societal hierarchies. Stone (2003) contends that vulnerable persons are characterized by an enhanced risk of being influenced or coerced. This research project involved participants who were experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities because they are Aboriginal, female, and victims of domestic violence (Liamputtong, 2007).

As such, there was a distinct need for sensitive research considerations and safeguards to protect the rights of the aforementioned participants (Liamputtong, 2007). Dickson-Swift and colleagues advocate for a humanistic and caring approach in dealing with vulnerable research participants (2010). Additionally, the creation of a safe,
supportive, and confidential interview setting will allow the participant to feel secure and comfortable in sharing their story with the researcher (Dickson-Swift et al., 2010). Participants were advised that they could request breaks at any point during the interview or end the session altogether if they were overwhelmed by the discussion. The researcher compiled a list of counseling agencies in the city, as included in Appendix E, (Family Service Regina, The Caring Place, Catholic Family Services, University of Regina Counseling Services, Greystone Bereavement Center, the Regina Sexual Assault Center, Eagle Moon Healing Centre, Aboriginal Family Services, and Circle Project) for participants to contact after the interview, if necessary. Information was provided on crisis agencies in Regina including Mobile Crisis Services, Sexual Assault Line, and the Crisis/Suicide Line (see Appendix E).
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Chapter three outlined the ontological and epistemological frameworks, qualitative research, semi-structured interviews, and data collection procedures utilized in this research. The researcher provided a detailed description of Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic network analysis which served as the guiding framework in which data analysis was completed. This chapter begins with an explanation of the sampling process, a demographic composition of the research participants, and a discussion of the interview procedures. Transcription and coding procedures are described in depth. Finally, a detailed description of each basic, organizing, and global theme, arranged in a thematic network as per Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic network analysis, is provided to assist the reader in understanding the relationships between the various thematic levels as well as answering the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

Recruitment, Interviews, and Demographic

In October 2014, recruitment letters and posters were emailed to a number of community agencies in Regina who have contact with Aboriginal women who have previously experienced domestic violence. Initially, seven agencies including, Family Service Regina, the Provincial Association of Transition Houses, Regina Police Service Victim Services, Regina Transition House, SOFIA House, YWCA Isabel Johnson Shelter, and YWCA My Aunt’s Place agreed to post the recruitment poster in their agency and to make clients aware of it. Only one organization declined to participate. In December 2014, a second round of recruitment letters and posters were sent out to 14 new agencies. Three agencies, including Regina Work Preparation Center, The Caring Place, and North Central Community Association agreed to assist the researcher, posting
the recruitment poster in their agency and referring clients to the poster. Eleven organizations did not respond to this inquiry. As a result of a low participant response to the recruitment efforts utilizing the posters, snowball sampling was employed in January 2015. This resulted in increasing the sample size by an additional three participants.

In total, the recruitment and interview process lasted eight months, spanning from October 2014 – May 2015. Seven women expressed initial interest in participating in the research project. However, two of these individuals later decided against taking part in the interview, resulting in a final sample of five women. Scheduling became an issue when setting up an interview time with participants. In some instances, participants would not show up to their scheduled interview or would need to reschedule their appointment multiple times. Two participants indicated that they were hesitant to participate in the research project because they felt that sharing their experience would cause them stress and anxiety. The researcher consulted with each participant to determine a safe, private, and confidential interview location. Two participants selected a private room at the University of Regina Library and three participants selected a private interview room at Family Service Regina. Each interview lasted between approximately 30 and 110 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded.

Participants⁴ were First Nations women ranging in age from 30 years to 55 years of age who had experienced domestic violence. All of the participants had left their abusive relationship and were working on living a lifestyle free from domestic violence. While all of the participants currently resided in Regina, Saskatchewan, four participants

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⁴ This thesis used the broader notion, Aboriginal peoples, in the first three chapters. Given that the research sample was comprised exclusively of First Nations women this is the specific wording that will be used from this point forward.
were originally from Saskatchewan and one was from out of province. Each woman had a connection (personal or familial) to the IRSS in Canada.

Thematic Network Analysis

Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic network analysis was used to complete the data analysis portion of this research project. This process is described extensively in chapter three. Table 1 (below) provides a summary of the analytic stages and steps the researcher followed to complete the final thematic network.

Table 1: Thematic Networks: Steps in the Analytic Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Stage A: Reduction of Breakdown of Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1. Code Material</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Devise a coding framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Dissect text into text segments using the coding framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2. Identify Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Abstract themes from coded text segments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Refine themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3. Construct Thematic Networks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Arrange themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Select basic themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Rearrange into organizing themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Deduce global theme(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Illustrate as thematic network(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Verify and refine the network(s)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Stage B: Exploration of Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4. Summarize Thematic Networks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Describe the network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Explore the network</td>
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<tr>
<th>Analysis Stage C: Integration of Exploration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 5. Summarize Thematic Networks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 6. Interpret Patterns</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391)

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher resulting in 70 pages of interview transcripts, averaging 14 pages per interview. Following Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic network analysis, a coding framework was constructed prior to the interviews using salient themes that came up in the literature review and research
questions. The researcher then reviewed the interview transcripts and selected codes in accordance with the coding framework. The term “issues discussed” has been used in place of the term “code” for purposes of this research project. Issues discussed represent single words or short phrases. During this process, the researcher was also open to unanticipated issues discussed that emerged when reviewing the transcripts. As such, this process was iterative in nature as the researcher needed to move back and forth between transcripts and issues discussed to represent the topics emerging in the data accurately. This is best exemplified when describing the basic theme, physical abuse. Initially, physical abuse in and of itself had been an issue discussed. However, as the researcher reviewed the data from subsequent interviews, other issues discussed (e.g. physical contact, forcible confinement) emerged. At this time, it made sense for physical abuse to be moved from an issue discussed to a basic theme in order to encapsulate the new issues discussed that had come up. A total of 210 issues discussed were initially identified during the analysis of the transcripts. After the completion of data analysis 161 of the initial issues discussed remained.

The researcher listed each issue discussed on an individual card and physically organized them into piles that logically made sense within the context of the literature and coding framework. Each pile was then assigned a basic theme. Each basic theme was pinned on the researcher’s bulletin board and grouped into organizing themes. Finally, based on the organizing themes that emerged, the researcher identified one global theme. The visual nature of this process helped the researcher identify patterns and assisted in grouping the various categories in a manner that was logical and easy to

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5 Potentially some issues discussed could have been combined with others. However, in order to ensure that each participants’ voice was equally reflected in the research project this number of issues discussed was retained.
understand. This was a valuable process when it came to refining themes and arranging the thematic network. This aspect of the analytic process commenced upon completion of the third interview. This was necessary given the lengthy period of time between the third and fourth interviews. As such, each subsequent interview was analyzed in concert with the earlier analyses, resulting in revisions as new issues discussed emerged.

The researcher iteratively reviewed the thematic levels several times to ensure that the basic themes, organizing themes, and global theme came together in a logical manner. Given the iterative nature of this process, changes to each of the aforementioned themes occurred at various stages of the analytic process. The thematic map (Figure 1), provided below, details the basic themes; represented by the textboxes, the higher level organizing themes; represented by the smaller circle, and the overarching global theme; represented by the largest circle. Direct quotes from the participants are provided to demonstrate how the researcher arrived at each basic theme. The researcher worked to incorporate quotes from each participant in an effort to give voice to all of their stories. Most basic themes included quotes from multiple participants. However, in order for each participants’ story to be represented some basic themes were comprised of a single participant quote.
Figure 1: Thematic Map

Indian Residential School Experience
- Racism/Systemic Oppression
- IRSS
- Abuse in IRSS
- Participants' Views on IRSS (positive & negative)
- Impact of IRSS Today on Participants

Dysfunction in Family Life
- Historical Factors
- Instability in Family of Origin
- Parenting Issues in Family of Origin
- Witnessing Violence as a Child
- Abuse in Childhood Home
- Refusal to Discuss Traumatic Experiences within the Family
- Trauma from Remembering Past Abuses
- Abuser's Background
- Community Violence
- Substance Abuse
- Participants' Personal Parenting Approaches
- Mental Health Issues

Trauma
- Loss
- Pain
- Anger

Domestic Violence
- Power and Control
- Emotional Abuse in DV Relationship
- Physical Abuse in DV Relationship
- Verbal Abuse in DV Relationship
- Criminal Justice System
- Impact/Effects of DV on Participants' Children
- Normalization of Domestic Violence
- Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship
- Standing up to DV Partner

Hope
- Change
- Aspirations
- Positivity
- Healing

Determination
- Survival
- Fleeing Abuse
- Coping
- Overcoming Addictions

Intergenerational Trauma and Violence
Organizing Theme 1: Indian Residential School Experience

Table 2 provides a summary of the topics arising in the analytic process by outlining the issues discussed, basic themes, and organizing themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Discussed</th>
<th>Basic Theme</th>
<th>Organizing Theme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sixties Scoop</td>
<td>Racism/Systemic</td>
<td>IRSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians Labelled as Dirty</td>
<td>Systemic Oppression</td>
<td>INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure of IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familial IRSS Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Attendance at IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unable to Leave IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refusal to Send Children to IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Abuse in IRSS</td>
<td>Abuse in IRSS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse in IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse in IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse in IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left Out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condemnation of Aboriginal Languages in IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding the IRSS</td>
<td>Participants Views on IRSS (positive &amp; negative)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Perceptions of the IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Perceptions of the IRSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRSSA</td>
<td>Impact of IRSS Today on Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Remains of IRSS Today</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of IRSS on Participants’ Sense of Identity</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of IRSS on Forming Healthy Intimate Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of IRSS on Parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of Education System</td>
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</table>
Basic Theme 1: Racism/Systemic Oppression

The first basic theme, “Racism/Systemic Oppression,” describes the participants’ views on discrimination and differential treatment on the basis of race. This theme was formed as a result of two issues discussed which emerged after reviewing the interview transcripts. These issues include the Sixties Scoop and Indians being labelled as dirty.

Sixties Scoop

Two participants referenced the Sixties Scoop in their interview. One participant noted it had been disruptive to the family system.

Back then there wasn’t very much until the 60s 70s, it [the Sixties Scoop] started. (Participant A)

Like it depends, you know, like my ex-husband is adopted into a white family – he was one of the Sixty’s Scoop babies. Yeah, so we were discussing all this stuff, like wow, we’re so messed up from our parents, we just thought we were great. (Participant B)

Indians Labelled as Dirty

Participants discussed a societal attitude which made them feel as though members of the Aboriginal culture were regarded as dirty. One participant indicated that she was made to feel as though she was in need of cleansing.

Just more strict with the nuns and, you know, being – having to be clean because Indians were labelled dirty back then, you know, stuff like that, yeah. (Participant D)

Like as soon as we’d come back when we were gone for holidays it was like – it was like we were like filthy. And like she was just really like horrid about it like it just made you feel like you went home and you needed to – it you was like you – like someone was spraying a pesticide at you like. (Participant E)
Basic Theme 2: IRSS

The second basic theme reflects participants’ views of the IRSS in Canada. Participants discussed a number of topics pertaining to the IRSS including the structure of the schools, familial attendance at the schools, and an inability to leave the IRSS.

Structure of the IRSS

One participant discussed the organizational structure of the IRSS, particularly, the shift from schools being run by the church to being run by the federal government.

Yeah because like I said I was 9 and like the one woman had been – she actually had been a nun and then – but she ended up becoming like a child care worker later on because it was no longer...run by the church. (Participant E)

Familial IRSS Attendance

Four participants had a familial connection to the IRSS. Each of these participants identified that one of their biological family members had attended an Indian Residential School in Canada. One participant stated that she had been adopted in childhood. Her adoptive mother had attended a residential school in Canada.

And like coming up in a dysfunction life and my mom has been in residential school and so have my uncles and auntsies, and the neighbours. (Participant A)

Well, my mom was at a residential school, but my dad so much, he...didn’t go to the residential school because his dad was like hiding him on the land. (Participant A)

Not 100% sure if it was Lebret. I can’t actually remember. But I know my mom was taken at five. Yeah, and she didn’t see her parents – only during the summer months, so. My dad, same thing too. They were both gone like right until I think grade eight. (Participant B)

Okay, so like I said both my parents were...both in residential – in the same residential school for many, many years. They were at the Gordon’s Residential School. Which was I guess was one of the last residential schools that were open. (Participant C)
Yeah, my mom did go to residential school. My mom was abused in residential school. (Participant E)

And that was exactly what happened in my mom’s years in school and...my dad and so like negative, negative, negative all around for school stuff. My mother attended residence until I think she was in grade ten. (Participant E)

I – I can’t really remember if my mom went to residential school. She never really talked about it. But...or yeah I guess so because well she told me her real name was Mary and then they – or...her real name is Elaine but her – her catholic name is Mary but they changed it or whatever when she was young in there. And she said the nuns were really mean – they were really mean and strict and, you know, making sure you were clean and what not. (Participant D)

Refusal to Send Children to IRSS

An unwillingness to send children to the IRSS was discussed by two participants. One participant indicated that her parents made alternative arrangements to have her and other children in the community transported to nearby small town to attend public school. Another advised that the hesitancy to send children to school stemmed from their parent’s fear of the school system as a result of their IRSS experience.

Actually, my parents, they refused to let us have anything to do with any Indian schools. So we weren’t allowed – like on the reserves they would find a way to get us to school, like in the cities. Like where my reserve is there is small towns. So...each parent or someone though the same would travel and drive the kids you know, one week, and then the next week it’s this parent. Until eventually there was a school system for Regina. So I’ve never, ever, attended an Indian school until recent. (Participant B)

Like it’s – like I said, a lot of things lend to it. People that had had problems with residential school also turn around and...want to – they want to protect their children from school. So then they’re not sending their children to school. And it, you know, it can create other problems. So where you’d think that oh well, oh well you went to – to school, you’re going to put your children through school but not if there was...all kinds of issues and then that also break things down. (Participant E)
Participant Attendance at IRSS

Three of the five participants personally attended an Indian Residential School in Canada. Two participants indicated that they had attended a day school while the other participant advised she had been a resident at the school.

I had attended the day school there when it was open. I was in the day school. I...had, you know, I wasn’t experiencing...anything like that and this was in I think ‘94 maybe. So I would have been in like grade 4. (Participant C)

I was only like – I think I only went to that to the...to the day school and that’s just like the last one that was still open – running was on my reserve and that was in the – I think it closed in the 19 in the 1997, 96-97. And I used to go there for like daycare and they would send me to like grade one, or no – no, I forget, kindergarten or nursery. (Participant D)

Well my mother attended residential school and I actually attended – attended the same residential school that she did. So and then like all my sisters attended so like I wasn’t...the only siblings that attended. (Participant E)

Unable to Leave IRSS

Feelings of helplessness and having nowhere to be able to escape the IRSS were discussed by one participant. She described feeling as though she did not have an escape from the negative things she was experiencing at the school.

Then she was worse with us like but...and then we seen like what happened and...and then no one got to tell our side of it and what was happening and all of us were scared of her. And like...she was like a bitter woman like she – she was alone and we knew – and she would bring up her life and stuff in the classroom and things that were so totally inappropriate. And yet...what can we do? We had no – like there was no form of...refuge I guess and she just was really mean to a few of us. (Participant E)

So like and that’s the whole thing like it’s just that if I would have had some other place to go – and I probably would have dropped out of school if I would’ve had somewhere to go because of the whole thing. But...I ended up staying there and then...it was it’s just that she...she just really ingrained it in my head. (Participant E)
Basic Theme 3: Abuse in IRSS

The third basic theme, “Abuse in the IRSS,” details the extensive physical, sexual, and emotional abuse suffered by the participants in the IRSS. A sense of alienation was described by the participants. One participant advised that this was due in part to a condemnation of Aboriginal languages.

General Abuse in IRSS

Some participants referenced abuse going on in the IRSS that did not explicitly fit into the other issues discussed (e.g. physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse). As such, the researcher grouped these references together to create an issue discussed which speaks to the general atmosphere of abuse in the IRSS.

Well, ever since residential school everything started coming out. Holy, that even myself I watched a video on the APTN. To the point – some point – oh god, there’s like, it was really too overwhelming for me to watch and these people were or whoever were talking about their past and [inaudible] what they lived through. (Participant A)

But I’ve heard like a lot of stories of you know abuse and stuff like that back then but not that I’ve actually heard. (Participant D)

You learn things as an adult sometimes that you don’t know as a child and one of the things that I really learned...subsequently was how the boys were being abused in the residential school. When they would go off to hockey things and stuff like that and then I remember them being squirmish and like you can tell, certain times when they didn’t want to do things and stuff that just didn’t quite seem right. (Participant E)

My mom talked a bit about...like the priests and...and about the same sorts of things about abuses going on and...when she talked about abuses – like not only with the priests but with the nuns too. And she talked about how – how she didn’t like herself. (Participant E)

Physical Abuse in IRSS

Four of the participants talked about physical abuse, namely in the form of pinching, being hit with the strap, and being attacked. These abuses were suffered by the
participants personally or by their family members who attended the IRSS. These participants also discussed the abuse suffered by fellow students in the IRSS and the impact that this had on them.

Yeah...she’s had a lot of physical stuff and it would be anytime of the day or night. She said a lot of times that they would be, you know, really, really on guard or sleep with one eye open type of thing in the night because there’d be – she said they would just hear kids like crying and crying. (Participant C)

My mom her too, same story about being, like straps were probably I guess the most common thing. (Participant C)

I was 9 years old and I was one of the kids that got picked on by the one teacher and she would hit us with the meter stick. Then this same teacher...the one student from Cote, he...he took the meter stick away on her the one day and he hit her with it and he was charged and he was removed from the school. (Participant E)

And she...she would pinch us and twist our skin and do different kinds of little things and she would grab our ears and pull us and...she was really super strict, like super strict. (Participant E)

Sexual Abuse in IRSS

Sexual abuse in the IRSS was a common issue discussed amongst many of the participants. Two participants advised that their mother had experienced sexual abuse in the IRSS and one participant discussed several incidents where she had been sexually violated.

I know there was sexual abuse just by certain comments that she [my mom] makes. So when we actually watched it on TV [We Are Children] we had to shut it off because my mom couldn’t handle it and that was when I clued in there was sexual abuse. [Because] it triggered her with the small rooms, when they started, you know, like...if they were taken into little rooms. (Participant B)

I had asked her if any sexual has happened to her...at the school or by, you know, anybody who was an authority over her at the school. She too was uncomfortable about talking about it so I got the feeling that things did happen to her. She said that there was a lot of abuse like sexual abuse that went on but it was always – it was...she said it mostly happened to the guys. (Participant C)
For me it was...I was raped [in the IRSS]. (Participant E)

And here he turned around and...like I said I had...worked at the residence in the kitchen and – and...and then so we would do extra kinds of things afterwards and...he came and found me and an shoved me into the cellar thing and...and attacked me and...then now I know what he had been experiencing. It doesn’t forgive it but yet like the rage and violence with it I just think like...I think I understand why he hurt me and at the time it took a lot like and I ended up in leaving like in grade ten...because of it and...I couldn’t get past it. I tried for a few months, I had to stay there for a few months and see him every day and all the things and be around him and him saying little things like as if I did something. (Participant E)

It was hard because the one child care worker pinched me, grabbed me, tried to touch me, and said stuff, would always say little stuff like when he would come around, like he would say, I can see your tits and...and like I like what you’re wearing. He knew that I was always there and then cornered me and then said...had been saying stuff like...making me feel like I was the one that was provocative and like I was doing wrong. And...and yet I didn’t. [My teacher] was always staring down my shirt and...he would rub on me like when he was supposed to be standing there showing me something or whatever and I would be trying to pull away. (Participant E)

**Emotional Abuse in IRSS**

Of all the types of abuses discussed that occurred in the IRSS, emotional abuse was the most frequently talked about. Being picked on, name calling, and cruelty from fellow students were all forms of abuse brought up by participants. Additionally, participants discussed a climate in the IRSS where they felt they were not allowed to express themselves and how this impacted their emotional development.

I guess it was more...like he wasn’t being touched or raped or assaulted or whatever but he was...talked down to in a sexual – like ugly sexual form or whatever it made him. Like he said, it made him feel ugly about himself or whatever and not – made him really uncomfortable. (Participant C)

And yeah, he said a lot of...times when they did want to express themselves...it was – they weren’t allowed to talk about their feelings and stuff like that. They were – it was sort of, yeah they were sort of told to just keep their feelings to themselves and everything so he wasn’t able to, you know, talk about it and whatever. (Participant C)
The schools there was – we were usually the only Indian kids [in the city school] and we were kind of the kids that were meaned on and like...and didn’t have real good...a real good experience. (Participant E)

I actually think the emotional abuse was worse. (Participant E)

And...she just really made us feel valueless and then – and it was because she knew – she knew like that from our backgrounds that nobody really – like we were the kids that stayed all the time and only went home on the big holidays and so she used that. (Participant E)

_Left Out_

One participant described a situation where two students in the IRSS were alienated from the other students in the school because they were smaller.

And then they clung to each other and – but they would get left out of things and then because of it. And then I remember finding it hard because I wanted to, you know, protect them because they were smaller and – and so there were things like that. (Participant E)

_Condemnation of Aboriginal Languages in the IRSS_

The condemnation of Aboriginal languages in the IRSS was brought up by one participant in two different situations. This participant described her father’s experience with discrimination due to his native tongue and then described a personal experience in the IRSS where two students were tormented for speaking their language.

And then...and my dad too was like – they experienced hard things like with school and their languages and their...appearances, and my dad was real dark and spoke only Cree. Like – like my grandparents too – like I was later raised with my grandparents for a while, like I said. Only spoke fluent Cree, never lived a day off the reserve, so completely different but because of that we carried that over and then...then we’re like...we were ridiculed and punished and shunned over it. (Participant E)

Yes, I mean it’s hard because like I remember these couple girls that were Dene and...and they would talk their language and I remember how...how cruel they got treated. And then they were...they liked to talk their language and...they were always getting belittled over it. (Participant E)
Basic Theme 4: Participants’ Views on IRSS (positive and negative)

“Participants’ Views on IRSS,” describes the positive and negative opinions expressed by the participants regarding the IRSS. It came together as a theme based on participants’ understanding of the IRSS and specific examples of how the structure and processes of the IRSS were both detrimental and constructive.

Understanding the IRSS

One participant detailed her experience in learning about the IRSS and understanding the structure as an adult. She noted that she did not have this understanding as a child because her parents did not discuss their experience at the IRSS and she did not attend a residential school herself.

Until I went to school, I didn’t understand my mom at all with all these issues and stuff and growing up until I went to SIIT. We had to spend three weeks on the residential stuff. And we actually had an elderly...Dakota woman come in and she started explaining certain behaviours and generations stuff and you know. (Participant B)

Negative Perceptions of the IRSS

Participants voiced negative perceptions of the IRSS and the accorded experience. These participants discussed a general atmosphere of negativity and a communal belief that the IRSS was a destructive institution.

Because they were both in residential and stuff like that and there’s always the negativity about residential, and there’s, you know. Well, there’s not too much positive. (Participant B)

But in terms on negatives there’s a lot of kids also dysfunctional. (Participant E)

But...it didn’t happen to me through the residence...but I could see, you know, just the...some of the effects that it had on my peers at that time because and I don’t if there was abuse going on at the time again...but from seeing...other students there like they must have had a shitty life up until, like you know, then to be at that. So I can see a lot of the ones that had been apprehended...acting out lots and – and
Yeah, it was just, yeah it was just it – it was obvious that there was something going on with some of the kids. (Participant C)

Is that like...I just thought that schools that was schools that’s where all the mean people were. And not a good way to look at education and then especially when you want to – when you have dreams of having a career and – and then like...hard to think of wanting stay there when that’s the case. (Participant E)

*Positive Perceptions of the IRSS*

Alternatively, one participant noted that her experience at the IRSS had not been entirely negative. She highlighted some positive aspects of the residential school she attended including obtaining an education, maintaining routine, and being surrounded by other Aboriginal students.

So like in terms of the good things, well schooling. I got education and it ended up helping me...subsequently to gain employment and so forth...so there’s that and the whole thing of like, you know, academic learning but at the same time...structure to someone’s life that – that sort of things. Like routine, all those kinds of things. And then I am from a Catholic background and...so there was that. (Participant E)

At least the one thing about residential school it was all Indian kids, we all had similar backgrounds, I met people all over that I’m still friends with today and communicate with today. We all – a lot of us went on to higher learning. Sports – I loved running, I used to run long distance and we’d run every day and like...and so that was a big thing that really helped. Academically I got the help that I needed. So like where I was failing here in grade 9 [in the city] and no one was helping me or anything like that instead when I went to residential school I was like getting 98, 96, like really good marks in algebra for grade 9 and 10 algebra so that was good – so there were benefits. I worked in the kitchen there and some other things. So there were positives. (Participant E)

She would always read us like a children’s bible story and I remember liking that and...there was a few little things that were okay. It was like it was good to stay, to have everything clean and organized – certain things that you could just count on. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 5: Impact of IRSS Today on Participants**

Participants reflected on the ways in which past experiences in the IRSS have impacted their lives today. This basic theme is comprised of discussions surrounding the
IRSSA, physical remains of the residential schools today, an inability to trust others, a negative impact on one’s sense of identity, difficulty in forming healthy intimate relationships, and a barrier to developing parenting skills. Additionally, participants recounted situations where there was a fear of the education system amongst family members.

**IRSSA**

The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was discussed in depth by one participant. This participant provided an overview of her experience and that of her close personal connections. She indicated that the aforementioned experience brought on negative emotions and led her to experience flashbacks.

And there’s no nothing that comes along later and fixes it like this whole thing like how they say there is healing dollars and so forth going into the communities or whatever. Like I myself all the bad memories and [because] I wasn’t raped once I was raped a few times in the residence. (Participant E)

Like it’s pretty sad when you know eight people who are dead now because of all of that and – and that right at the time how it blew them away and it becomes hate like because I know for me like – and that’s why I didn’t even want it. And so like it never got me nothing, all it did was cause me pain because it brought up all that stuff and messed me up for two years. And then like and...and then like when we couldn’t – I ended up going and getting a lawyer and the one lawyer ended up messing things up and everyone had to – was supposed to reapply and then I didn’t end up following through with it [IRSSA]. Because it caused me too much pain and then like...some people didn’t understand that. (Participant E)

And then my mom ended up...not getting her residential school money – she died before it happened and that happened with a lot of people and so, yeah. (Participant E)

Like it all got stirred up during that time when everyone was applying for residential school money and crap and – and then like messed up. (Participant E)
Physical Remains of IRSS Today

One participant still returns to the community where her partner attended a residential school. She provided a discussion of what the school was used for after the residential school was closed and what remains of it today.

Yeah, but it still stands. They like – they held it up as like...a group home for like young children, like Four Directions. And yeah, they used it as that for a while but now it’s just an abandoned building. It’s still there. (Participant D)

Lack of Trust

Participants brought up difficulties in trusting other people. They attributed this mistrust to their experience in the IRSS whereby their trust in authority figures was betrayed. Participants contended that the aforementioned experience affected their ability to open up to other people.

And like mom does admit, I think if I would have just trusted you. Because they did raise me to be you know, trustful. But they didn’t trust, you know, just because of their own actions. (Participant B)

You don’t see this, you don’t understand it, you trust people in positions of authority – all these sorts of things that totally twist up your mind and then...and so after that it was like broke down trust things with people. I would be very nervous to do other things. And – and it just always kind of left that with me in different ways and it’s taken, you know, like it’s taken all my life to get to a point where I can just, you know, just try and start of in relationships of trust as opposed to in – being unsure and...scared of things. (Participant E)

And...she never trusted men after so she never ended up...remarrying until later in life. (Participant E)

I just never ever, ever had trust of things with people so it’s like kind of sad but true. Like I’m the kind of person that can’t just be comfortable with people in their home even. I’m kind of like that in the fact that like – so if people did come to my house I wouldn’t sleep, like and I’d keep checking on things and like you know and – and like I’d go and I’d sleep with my kids and stuff like that. (Participant E)
Impact of IRSS on Participants’ Sense of Identity

One participant described feeling as though the IRSS has usurped her sense of self. She provided insight as to where these feelings originated and stated that they have followed her from the IRSS to present day.

And because like...and I – I think why I think that it because it seemed to have a longer term effect in that it had me believe that I was valueless and it had me believe that I couldn’t do it. (Participant E)

Impact of IRSS on Forming Healthy Intimate Relationships

When discussing the impact of the IRSS two participants talked about the detrimental impact of the IRSS on forming healthy intimate relationships. The participants made a connection between the separation of males and females in the IRSS and subsequent issues in relating and respecting members of the opposite sex.

The boys and girls were always sort of separately so that could have been a – you know, something to make that urge for that relationship to be stronger, you know, like where, you know, you’ve been separated from boys all your life now you’re, you know, a girl with hormones and want to – yeah want to you know, get that fulfilled, so you know. I can see how easily it is to how easy it is to find – not even to find – just to attract that...unstable person or whatever just to, you know, in hopes that there is a dysfunctional balance. (Participant C)

And then like...it was so confusing like...I just remember feeling really confused about would I want a boyfriend, would I not want a boyfriend when – when it was all supposed to be normal for my age like...to start to think about boy and girl relationships when you are a teenager and 14 and so on and yet you instead are in fear of things and unsure and you think you’re doing everything wrong and you’re self-conscious about your body and...all these things so messed up. (Participant E)

Impact of IRSS on Parenting

Participants identified that parenting practices were impacted by the IRSS in an intergenerational fashion. Participants or their family members who had attended the IRSS missed out on the opportunity to learn how to raise a child from their own parents.
Subsequently, these individuals encountered difficulties when parenting their children.

As a result, the participants felt that because of this they did not have a role model from which to learn appropriate parenting practices.

And I do believe that residential school plays a huge part in...you know, the way my parents were raised...and obviously the way they raised me. (Participant C)

And then – and it just kind of trickles in all different directions because if you also never received or – or learned good parenting skills from your children because that’s how...people learn and even animals learn from the parents, you know, showing them things. A deer learns to find grass and what it needs in the same way and then shows its child how to protect themselves and so on. But if we don’t have those things then...of course there is going to be dysfunction and that’s what I mean. (Participant E)

And then, you know, and...and I would have to tell myself in my head like, no hug, them love them like show affection, and – and...and I would always be trying to pull myself to...change that – that and so like it did affect – affect me and yet...and I ended up turning around and like yeah, I’d say like in...comparison I did a good job with my kids. But...but I know there were things like...it wasn’t natural to be happening. It was – it wasn’t where, you know, I knew how to be that parent from having had that it was me telling myself, love them and do this and – and...don’t – don’t let them feel the way you felt. It was like all the time trying to do the opposite of what I went through as a kid and that’s a hard thing. (Participant E)

Because...residential school twisted their mind about the educational system and about schooling and now there needs to be ways to find and undo that and there needs to be – you know, where there was a loss of parenting skills, well now find ways to be able to put those parenting skills back in place and link them yeah, with school so that it can improve and so that our kids can get educated. (Participant E)

*Fear of Education System*

A final impact of the IRSS identified by participants was the resulting fear of the education system. One participant discussed the fact that individuals who had previously attended the IRSS were concerned about sending their children to school for fear that the outcome would be the same as their personal experience.
There’s so much drop outs and...parents don’t take the...like are scared of the school so they don’t go to the parenting things, they don’t go to the things and get real involved in their kids schooling and so forth. (Participant E)

And...it’s sad like listening to the whole thing and then how my mom would say, oh I’m glad you guys, you know, do good in school and you try. And she’d say...there’s good stuff about school but she said oh and she’d kind of like have a little shake but there’s hard things and like you’d just know it was so bad and then and, yeah my mom did share in some ways but lots of it just wasn’t good. (Participant E)

**Summary of Organizing Theme 1**

Organizing theme 1, “Indian Residential School Experience,” describes five basic themes: racism/systemic oppression, IRSS, abuse in the IRSS, participants’ views on IRSS, and the impact of IRSS today on participants. Various forms of racism and systemic oppression were referenced by the participants. The ideologies that fueled these oppressions were also those that lead to the formation of the IRSS in Canada. Former residents discussed feeling discrimination towards their culture and felt as though they were being treated as inherently damaged and in need of repair. Former students also expressed difficulty in trusting others because they had been so deeply betrayed by authority figures in the IRSS. Participants detailed ongoing and escalating physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in the schools. The participants labeled this experience as terrifying and horrific with crippling long-term consequences.

Participants indicated that the IRSS has significantly affected their ability to maintain healthy domestic relationships and parent their children. The IRSS separated students by gender and this led to difficulties navigating relationships and understanding the opposite sex later in life. The fact that children had been taken from their home, unable to grow up with healthy parenting role models, and placed in an IRSS were the
reasons identified by participants for why parenting skills were lacking in some situations.

A resulting mistrust of others and an inability to move on from trauma were two additional consequences of the IRSS. Throughout the discussion of the aforementioned topics, participants continually referenced the negative impact of the traumas on their life. However, a dichotomy emerged whereby some participants revealed both negative and positive perceptions of the IRSS. Positive aspects that came up in the interviews included a sense of routine, access to educational instruction, and being surrounded by other Aboriginal students.

Organizing Theme 2: Dysfunction in Family Life

Table 3 presents a detailed summary of the relevant issues which emerged from the data. This table lists the issues discussed, the basic themes, and the overarching organizing theme.

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Basic Theme 1: Historical Factors

The basic theme “Historical Factors,” details the participants’ reflections on their personal foundations and knowledge of family origins. This theme emerged based on two issues discussed: family history and community of origin.

Family History

Two participants described a lack of knowledge about their family history. Both advised that this was due to an unwillingness on the part of their family to discuss issues relating to the past issues. Within the broader context of the research, participants seemed to suggest that these past issues were related to violence and abuse.

Because there is lots that we don’t know about our family history, seems like it. (Participant A)

But I didn’t know that [the death of my older sister], like I’m not supposed to know it. But I figured it out. (Participant B)

Community of Origin

This basic theme simply reflects the community where each participant comes from. Four participants were from reservations in Saskatchewan and one participant was from out of province.
I’m from Muskowegan First Nation. (Participant D)

[I’m from] Piapot. (Participant B)

**Basic Theme 2: Instability in Family of Origin**

The second basic theme outlines the numerous traumas and issues encountered in the participants’ family of origin. A total of nine issues discussed comprise this basic theme. Participants reflected on a number of topics including, but not limited to, dysfunctional familial relationships, transiency, poverty, the gendered effects of the IRSS, and familial disapproval of domestic relationship.

*Dysfunctional Family*

Four participants characterized the relationships within their family as dysfunctional. This dysfunction was attributed to a multitude of factors including intergenerational trauma, estranged family members, and the apprehension of children by government agencies. Estrangement of family members was a contributing factor to instability in the participants’ family of origin. Familial violence was the initial trauma which led to the later difficulties.

I – when you come out from dysfunction and all the abuse you have suffered through and – and you have seen a lot as growing up in a small community and I seen and I have suffered through a lot of dysfunction life and I felt like – I didn’t feel normal, I didn’t feel like, I – I – I couldn’t be myself. (Participant A)

So he [my brother] came to my mom’s brother...my – my mom’s sister and told her – and they haven’t talked in 10 years. (Participant B)

So, I – I never had a relationship with my brother since I was probably eight. And then this summer we actually built a sweat lodge. And my brother’s house is – like my mom’s is here, and my – my grandpa’s is there, and my brother’s house is there. We’re like, for someone who hated...our family so much they had to go build their house like right down the road, do you know what I mean? So it’s like why didn’t you make your own village, like far. (Participant B)
I didn’t know how to feel because when I’m around him [my brother] I just start getting jumpy. So – he – he asked my partner, like why does my sister act like that? You know. And he’s like, it’s what you did a long time ago and he’s like, you need to talk to her someday about it. So…whenever he’s around I just start freaking out, like, because I remember guns, and you know – just. (Participant B)

There was – well I guess after my dad there was…she ended up having kids with like – like two of my sisters with a guy and then – and then I must have been about eight or nine when she had the baby and that was with someone separately, so yeah. I guess she had two relationships after my dad where she had two kids and like yeah. (Participant C)

So even before then she was like trying to work on us coming home but never worked out, so no. (Participant D)

*Cycle of Violence in Familial Relationship*

Familial violence follows a cycle similar to that experienced in intimate partner relationships. Participants described the intergenerational nature of this cycle and advised that violence in previous generations had a significant impact on subsequent generations. Additionally, participants provided insight into the tendency of children to observe and later repeat violent behaviours modeled in the home.

Like…I don’t know how to word it but I think it’s [family violence] all connected like from families. (Participant B)

So it’s sad because like I said, dysfunction breeds dysfunction and so. (Participant E)

That there also is…a lot of people that really just never got supports that they needed growing up and then in turn it has consequence when they become parents and so forth…and then having been raised differently…it just runs that kind of stream. I think I was blessed by the fact that…he too had…bad experiences and he just never wanted to carry that on – like over to our children. And we both had that as like a really big thing for us that we – we never wanted to have our kids messed up or to be scared in their own home or to…to learn things from us that. Like how like what I seen with my mom and dad’s marriage and how I told him like, you know, like my mom – my dad died and yet…I still carry this and this was my mom’s poor married life like and then she just stayed alone and – and then that was the same thing with his mom. His mom ended up being alone for…all her later years too and it was because of abuses that happened early on. And then…so in that way I think we understood each other but like I said I
think...where things just kind of came full tilt was all this residential stuff being – stuff screwing things up. (Participant E)

**Transiency**

Participants expressed frustration in the fact that they were moved from place to place throughout childhood. In one situation, the participant had made the decision to move from her parent’s home to her brother’s home. However, she was upset at the fact that neither location was an appropriate place for her to reside. Alternatively, one participant was removed from her childhood home and placed in a residential school. From there, she flitted between her home reserve and the city of Regina, Saskatchewan.

So ended up moving – my sister lives in the town so they gave me to her for a bit. Then they sent me to my brother, which I’m like nope, I’m going to be good, because he was still getting high and stuff. So then from there...I just started meeting up with bad people in high school. Well choice, you have the choice, so I just choose those kind of people. (Participant B)

I got to know a lot of – like growing up...all different places – so residential school...the reserve of my grandmother and then also in [the city]. (Participant E)

**Poverty**

A lack of financial resources and limited access to employment were two identified components of a disadvantaged socioeconomic position. Addiction also intersected with poverty where the participants’ parents would spend the entirety of the household allowance on alcohol leaving little for food, bills, and rent.

And it’s like and they were both, like my mom and her like partner were always on welfare so basically they would just, you know, drink that up and then, you know, there would be nothing left or whatever for during the week or you know, food was always scarce. (Participant C)

And...having been raised in...poverty. (Participant E)
Gendered Effects of IRSS

Participants provided insight into their understanding of gender roles as modeled in their childhood homes. One participant indicated that she noted a dichotomy where females were responsible for duties in the home and the male was the sole breadwinner for the family. Other participants expressed that they did not have healthy ideals about domestic relationships as they had grown up watching their father be abusive towards their mother. The end result was that they felt as though they were unable to trust men because they had never had a healthy and supportive male figure in their life.

Women have to accept the position they’re in and you think that that’s just the way it is and that everyone is like that. You start to think that girls – yeah, like it’s all our job and we’re the ones that do wrong and really we’re – it’s supposed to be perfect. He [my dad] basically had believed that certain rules were for my mom. So my mom was to take care of the whole home – he was to be able to be kind of a breadwinner and...but, you know, he could do as he wanted. He could provide whatever...groceries and whatever kind of...home and...and he was mean to my mom. (Participant E)

Like her mom [my grandmother] was abused but her dad died early, early on in her life. So yeah, I just don’t think that she had that strong male role to protect her and it just goes on and in a cycle [because], you know. It made so many other ugly...relationships with males like not healthy or and [because] I never had my dad. (Participant C)

So like and I was tiny like I said it was before I turned five – like I was four, before my dad died. And yet I have that in my head that he was mean and was – like most of my memories were not good and I only had a few good memories of my dad. (Participant E)

But I mean so there was a lack of trust of men even though like my dad died – I was four and then I went on and but I just – there was never a trust of men. (Participant E)
Family Members Splitting Up

Two participants discussed the separation of their parents and the traumatic impact that this had in their lives. Further to this, one participant talked about her experience in supporting her mother through divorce and re-marriage.

Well my mom and my dad split up when I was about three. (Participant C)

Like we were all grown up when she remarried I think she was 56 but like...we were already all gone from – from her home and then her marriage never lasted – she married – she was married maybe a year and but she said she just never could get past that whole thing of trust and they had – she more or less just married a friend and it didn’t work out. (Participant E)

Participants also commented on the division of siblings into different homes. Siblings were sent to live with different family members because there was too much going on in the family home for the parents to handle on their own.

My brother always lived with my grandma...because of like my grandma didn’t...you know, let him go through that I guess so she just kind of took him away from my mom. Like he was young because – and there was so much shit going on. (Participant C)

Siblings Experiencing Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in adult life was experienced by both the participants and their siblings. This likely occurred due to the fact that the siblings had grown up in the same environment as the participants where violence was a normal and acceptable component of their childhood home.

Yeah and there’s – and plus his wife is weird. Like, she abused him so much – mentally, emotionally, and physically. But if me or my sister go up to my brother and even tried to give him a hug, she would later say, your sisters are flirting with you. (Participant B)

My younger sisters are all – like now it’s the same thing for them – every weekend cut lips, black eyes, can’t talk to us because he said so. (Participant C)
Participants’ Parent in Violent Relationship

Participants provided extensive detail and observation into their parents’ experience in an abusive intimate partner relationship. The duration of this abuse varied; in some situations it was an isolated incident and in others it lasted over 20 years.

I’ve seen...my mother go through many, many...bad relationships. (Participant C)

Well she would always go back because like I guess she would miss him. I mean I know she was sad and I remember her being sad lots. But I remember her feeling like she had nowhere to go or I can’t stay with other people. Or you know, especially under you know, and like I remember we would always go back to her mom’s and like my grandma would be like, you know like, well, evil fuckers [inaudible]. But she would be like – and then she would be like no don’t tell me – like because my mom’s stubborn, right? And so she would be like no don’t tell me about – like don’t tell me what to do or whatever. And we’re not staying here and we’re going home. And I remember so many times where I was like, I don’t want to go back there. I don’t want to go back there. (Participant C)

Like he – my dad was a really clean person and really...like really clean shaven, really had to have his shirt and dress pants pressed and like perfectly and so like you know – she was – if something wasn’t done just perfect and...starched and all that kind of thing during the day...you know, he would throw things or he would...like hit her. (Participant E)

Familial Disapproval of Domestic Relationship

Family members were concerned for a participant when she was in an abusive relationship. The family of one participant expressed their disapproval of her violent partner outright and advised her that they would not have anything to do with her so long as she was with him. This participant talked about the hypocrisy of this statement because her mother had been in a violent relationship off and on for a period of 20 years.

My parents were – like my mom was really upset with me for like even bothering with him and stuff and I thought I was just again, just gonna like party and have a good time and then go back there because I was living in [the city] at the time. Anyways, I ended up like my mom and them were like well you can’t come back here and bring that shit around here because they knew just how violent he was or whatever. (Participant C)
Basic Theme 3: Parenting Issues in Family of Origin

Concerns regarding parenting practices, a loss of childhood innocence, and government involvement within the family unit were discussed by participants in relation to the third basic theme. The third basic theme came together as a result of five basic themes: child forced into parental role, lack of parental affection, government apprehension in childhood, foster home, and overprotective parents. Each of these is discussed below.

Child Forced into Parental Role

Three participants reflected on their childhood and situations where they were inappropriately forced into a parental role. Lapses in parental judgement resulted in the participants moving into a nurturing role where they were obligated to provide food, look after, and shield their younger siblings from violence in the household.

Pretty much the oldest daughter was the one that taught all the way down – my oldest sister. (Participant B)

I was looking after my younger sisters...all the time from about five or six they were calling me like – calling me like mom and sometimes I would steal money sometimes I would steal food just to...you know, keep care of them or whatever when – when they were drunk. (Participant C)

I was...the one that was responsible for everyone so then you know, if something went wrong it was my fault or whatever. (Participant C)

Yeah, like...we had...I have my older – my aunties and my older cousins, Delphine and Iona, that were there too and they were probably like took me and my younger cousins away or something, you know. Like because I don’t remember – I don’t remember like violence or them fighting or anything. Let’s see I would have been...five or like three or like I don’t know, pretty young anyways, so they must have been like ten. (Participant D)
Lack of Parental Affection

The IRSS experience left former students with an inability to feel and express emotions in a healthy manner. As such, when these individuals became parents they encountered difficulties in conveying feelings of love and affection towards their children.

You know, it was very loving but to a point where our parents wouldn’t hug us all the time but we knew they loved us, you know. Stuff like that, it was just different. (Participant B)

Because with my parents, anything negative that came up in our life...was not open discussion. You know like, like going through stages of life our mom wasn’t communicative like with you know, starting your time and all that stuff. (Participant B)

Government Apprehension in Childhood

Involvement with the Ministry of Social Services was discussed by two participants. The first participant talked at length about the abuses she suffered in her childhood home. She advised Social Services was not involved with her family but that she wished they had been.

I wish I had [been taken out of the home by Social Services]. I wish I had because I suffering so much through trauma. Yeah, but I wasn’t taken. I don’t know why back then I wasn’t taken. (Participant A)

But I wish, like you know, sometimes I wish that like somebody did rescue me and help me, like you know. But now in my life, I have suffered half of my life with what I lived. (Participant A)

The biological mother of one participant was addicted to drugs and alcohol which eventually led to the apprehension of her children. A pattern was identified whereby several members of this family had children, fell into addiction, and lost their children to the Ministry of Social Services.
Just well like I really don’t know [the reason I was adopted]. But probably it – basically because my mom was unstable – like, you know, an alcoholic and into drugs and stuff. (Participant D)

Well...my whole family like...that’s just a bunch of cycles that keep happening over and over and over in my biological family like with the drinking and with the foster care losing kids – our kids to foster care and...drinking basically. (Participant D)

*Adoption*

One participant was apprehended from the home of her biological mother and was placed with a foster family. She advised that she still keeps in contact with her biological mother but that her adoptive mother and siblings are who she considers family.

Three years old [when I was adopted]. (Participant D)

Yeah, yeah. I still kept in contact with them and I know who they are and everything. But it was just that I would rather – my – my adoptive family is more of my family today than my biological family, I guess. (Participant D)

*Overprotective Parents*

The accidental death of a child spurred two parents to become overbearing and controlling. As a result, their remaining children felt suffocated and began to rebel against the stringent household rules. One participant advised that she rushed into an unhealthy relationship to escape her parents.

My parents were really – like after my sister died...I had it rough. Like, I couldn’t even breathe on my own. You know, my parents were so panicked – like the overprotection. So I couldn’t have a normal social life. You know how like you’re going to your prom or you’re going to your school dance, well my parents would be pretty much be out the door. You know, I can’t sneak outside to go, you know, just hang out with my friends outside or sneak a smoke, right, or anything. So, it was just – they just were always there. Like if I went on my bike, it would be half a mile to my uncle’s and all the kids are there – teenagers my age. If I didn’t get home by 8:15, I might as well just split somewhere else, you know, like. Because then, like – it’s like they were so embarrassing. Like they would literally freak out. They would show up, you know, within 8:20 – you know, it’s just down the road, I’m good, you know, I’m going to be home, it’s not dark yet. (Participant B)
But for me, being overprotected, not being able to do this, that, you know, just normal teenage stuff. My parents isolated me so much that I pretty much started going out, like on my own. Jump out the window and I would hike to Regina, you know, and I wouldn’t come back. (Participant B)

**Basic Theme 4: Witnessing Violence as a Child**

The fourth basic theme outlines three different forms of violence witnessed during childhood. Participants provided detail on witnessing abuse in the IRSS, witnessing domestic violence in the childhood home, and the DV abuser witnessing domestic violence as a child. Additionally, participants talked about the traumatic impact and long term implications of the aforementioned experience.

*Witness Abuse in IRSS*

Former IRSS students conveyed to their children that they had been exposed to violence during their time in the school. Participants indicated that their parents had spoken about their experience watching fellow students endure emotional, verbal, sexual, and physical abuses.

She witnessed some girls that went through things. How rough they were on the girls. The things she talks about like – like, it’s just, you won’t believe. They lived through it. (Participant A)

[My dad mentioned] having to witness a lot of like physical abuse...like children getting like straps. (Participant C)

But yeah, definitely both my parents said that they had...you know, recall seeing a lot of stuff that went on there. (Participant C)

*Witness Domestic Violence in Childhood Home*

Four participants advised that they had witnessed some form of domestic violence in the home while growing up. In some situations, the violence was between parents and in others it was between a sibling and their partner. The detrimental impact of the
experience was emphasized with one participant contending the dysfunction in one generation breeds dysfunction in the next.

Yeah, I witnessed lots of...like...physical violence with my parents. My dad beat on my mom. (Participant A)

I seen it back then there was lots of drinking going on and lots of violence going on with the family. And I feel like the kids pick up so much stuff from it. (Participant A)

No, I think – I think...watching what my brother did to his wife, you know, at a young age. (Participant B)

So I’m not – yeah so I’m not sure – like I always knew and I felt like awful and sick and sometimes I – sometimes I. Like I remember times where I would...I could hear fighting and stuff going on in the back ground but it was just like a constant like buzz and lots of the time that’s kind of how it was like a constant buzz and everything was just sort of shut out and I had to like think fast and do what I had to do. Like there was so many times like when I had to be hiding and like run out into the street or wherever just to like find a phone or find some help or...yeah. (Participant C)

Was physically abusive to my mom he...but I remember as a child being thrown in the closet and I remember. (Participant E)

_DV Abuser Witnessing Domestic Violence as a Child_

The abusive partners of the participants were also witness to domestic violence in their childhood home. The participants observed that the aforementioned experience during formative years likely contributed to their violent behaviours as adults.

Even with my first boyfriend, his dad used to beat up on his mom a lot. (Participant A)

Yes, yes because like he seen it with his mom and dad and, you know, really bad and when – where he used to – where Kevin used to be so mean and try do mean things to me was portraying of what he was shown and taught as a kid. (Participant D)

Where people don’t learn to parent, where people seen abuses go on and then it carried on where...you know, kids that end up abused often end up becoming abusers. (Participant E)
Basic Theme 5: Abuse in Childhood Home

The experience of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in the childhood home was commonplace in this research. This basic theme focuses on abuses suffered in the childhood home and is different from those abuses endured in the IRSS which are covered in the first organizing theme, “Indian Residential School Experience.” Participants indicated that these abuses had been inflicted upon them by their parents, siblings, teachers, and neighbours.

Verbal Abuse in Childhood Home

Yelling, name calling, and lectures were identified components of the verbal abuse suffered in the family home. One participant advised that the abuse impacted her significantly at the time it was happening but went on to state that the long term implications were just as bad.

There’s just so much violence, so much verbal abuse, physical abuse. That I grew up now, I noticed that it really has impacted my life so much. (Participant A)

We used to get lectured like that, we used to get verbal abuse like that a lot. (Participant A)

Physical Abuse in Childhood Home

Four of the five participants were able to reflect on physical abuses that took place in their childhood home. The other participant had spent the majority of her childhood in the IRSS and therefore, was not in her childhood home to experience abuse there. The range of violence ranged from what could be thought of as a minor assault to severe beatings.

And if it’s not my mom, it’s us kids taking the beating. We were beaten a lot. (Participant A)
Like in school it was challenging because...basically, I didn’t tell you this but...in kindergarten and grade one...I was being abused at Cupar High School – or Elementary. Back in the day left handed people, you know, the teachers there considered you part of the devils – you know, devil’s children if you wrote with your left hand. So I used to get my hand tied up during...school hours and I would be forced to write with my right, right. And then they would let it go, you know, after a few weeks and try and get me to – so if I got caught they would hit you with a ruler, right. (Participant B)

And my brother, when he would get drunk, he would come back to the reserve and he would smash up our vehicles, our home. And sometimes the police would be out and then they would have to escort us off the reserve. And then...sometimes...he would hold us hostage with a gun. (Participant B)

This once where my mother was drinking – my biological mom and she had us home for – for a weekend. She had us home anyway, me and my brothers, I have one older brother and one younger biological. And...and I do remember her like being home – coming home and her being drunk and having alcohol on the table. And...the power was shut off and we used to get power from my uncle and my uncle just lived like right across the – right across the road from us and we would just have to like plug the – plug the cord or something in and it would light up a light. And so that’s how we got light and I was freaking out and crying and like wanting my mom’s attention and she didn’t give me attention and she got really mad and like kind of just held me down and choked me. (Participant D)

When I was younger – it was like he would tell my mom, and like he would tell my mom to...like spank me or hit me or whatever. And – but when we got older and into sort of maybe early teen years like he would...he would you know, hit us or whatever himself. (Participant C)

**Sexual Abuse in Childhood Home**

Inappropriate and forced sexual relations took place in two of the participants’ childhood homes. In one situation, the participant herself was sexually abused by a neighbor. Another participant advised that her brother had been sexually abused by a neighbor and that this had caused him to turn to substances to cope with his issues.

[Because] I was sexually abused by my neighbour. (Participant A)

And I carried that around with me [sexual abuse] until I was like almost 23 years old. Yeah, I never told nobody. (Participant A)
Like, soon as, like something happened to him [my brother], I believe sexual abuse. I don’t know if it was one of the sitters during my parent’s drinking or something. Like someone did something to him when...I think when I think he was 11 or 12. (Participant B)

Child Neglect

Participants discussed situations where their physiological needs were ignored and they were abandoned for periods of time by their caregivers. Additionally, participants noted these behaviours in the parenting practices of their siblings and other community members. All of the participants indicated that neglect had occurred in these situations because the accorded caregivers chose to use alcohol and drugs.

And I didn’t even know about the two kids because we always drank at this house, his sister’s house. She just kept her babies in the bedroom which was a six month old and a one year old. So I’ve never seen them for like a whole year like the time of all our drinking and hanging out there, I was shocked. (Participant B)

Lots of times we were left alone so we wouldn’t even know where they were drinking. (Participant C)

No, because like after that...she left and she left me and she left me and my brother’s home alone. He was like...well he was just – he’s a year older than me so not very old. (Participant D)

Basic Theme 6: Refusal to Discuss Traumatic Experiences within the Family

“Refusal to Discuss Traumatic Experiences within the Family,” outlines the unwillingness and in some cases, inability, to talk about painful situations within the family unit. This basic theme came together as a result of four basic themes: doesn’t talk about it, shielding, pretend, and private. Each of these is discussed in further detail below.

Doesn’t Talk About It

All of the participants expressed frustration in the fact that their family members, particularly their parents, were unwilling to discuss traumatic incidents. Within the
broaden context of the interviews, the participants seemed to suggest that the IRSS and previous instances of violence and abuse were the events they were unwilling to discuss. Participants attributed a reluctance to talk about these experiences to the fact that this practice would cause stress and anxiety for their family members.

And I noticed that she’s really, I noticed that she never told us about what she really went through and want really happened. She doesn’t tell us about so much about her background and we have to find things out through other people other like stories, other gossip. I find her really like...so much hidden from us. I don’t know what really happened and like, it’s really hard to get close to her, I know that. (Participant A)

I kind of see both because the way my mom was – I find her really closed up. I wish, like, she could open up and say what really happened to her. (Participant A)

Nothing. Both my parents say what happened to them we’ll never know, it’ll go with them to their graves. So with my dad it’s true [because] my dad’s been gone 20 years and my mom, once in a while she’ll bring up little things indirectly. (Participant B)

My dad today, when I ask him questions about...what had gone on at residential school or some of his experiences...I get the feeling that he sort of shuts down and doesn’t want to talk about some of the stuff. (Participant C)

Just something that [the IRSS] I didn’t bother to bring up I guess. (Participant D)

**Shielding**

Some family members felt that it was their responsibility to shelter others from the reality of their traumas. In doing so, these individuals were able to avoid recalling the negative events of their past. However, participants advised that this practice was not helpful and that it actually created further issues because the root issue was never addressed.

Just from listening to my siblings like they didn’t, they don’t – everybody shields everybody in the family. (Participant B)

Growing up like that, you know, you just kind of shield it all. So that’s what basically happened. (Participant B)
Pretend

One participant detailed her mother’s habit of portraying their dysfunctional family life as happy and light-hearted. This participant referred to her mother as an “actor” and was angry with the fact that her mother would sooner pretend than work to repair the damages within the family unit.

I don’t want to pretend to be somebody else. I don’t want to pretend everything is ok. I didn’t want to pretend any more. I don’t want to pretend to be – to make everything good around me like my mom used to. (Participant A)

You know, try to pretend to be something they’re not or try to pretend to be perfect, yeah. My mom was a really good person to hide everything. Like, making surroundings look really good. Trying to – she make us out to be a really good actor for people, to be perfect kids. (Participant A)

She started hiding us, hiding from the community that everything was ok with us. Which it wasn’t ok. (Participant A)

Private

Finally, an atmosphere of secrecy and privacy was noted in the family home by participants in this research. One participant indicated that she had never witnessed her parents argue and the according silence seemed strange to her.

We had never seen my parents argue. They never argued. If they did, it was private. Like everything about our whole life was private like with them. So I’ve never seen my dad hit my mom or I’ve never seen them yell at each other. I’d hear little disagreements, like normal, but joking. You know, but nothing – like which is odd, because – it was really odd, that’s what me and my siblings would say, like that’s odd. Not creepy – but you know what I mean, it was just a different experience. Like silence, you know, that’s what it was. (Participant B)

The ones that went to residential school – I find that so much they are not saying very much. I find that they are really closed like, there’s something really closing them up. I find it like he [my ex partner] always tells me I was the first woman to get close to him. I find her [my mom] really closed up. (Participant A)
Basic Theme 7: Trauma from Remembering Past Abuses

The seventh basic theme describes the emotions associated with recounting past traumas. Participants indicated that they regularly experienced flashbacks, anxiety, and were triggered by various stimuli in their environment. Additionally, participants identified the numerous ways in which past traumas continue to impact them today.

Flashbacks

The first issue discussed describes involuntary recurrent memories as experienced by the participants in this research. Flashbacks pertaining to the IRSS experience, familial dysfunction, and domestic violence were most commonly described by participants. Physical symptoms and emotional stress were the associated reactions to experiencing flashbacks.

Because after a while, like about 3 or 2 years ago, I started to really start living the past and I was stuck in the past and I [inaudible] and I forgot my kids and I knew, I knew something wasn’t right. (Participant A)
And just like, reliving the past, reliving all the life that I gone through and let my son live this kind of life and pass it on to him. I look at my son – and said what I didn’t have my son can have it all. (Participant A)

I keep flashbacks and I keep having. (Participant A)

I came to the point where, like you know, it brought me back to my ugly past, with my parents. (Participant A)

Then the same thing that resolution thing came across and we went – I went to the university – well I worked at the university so I went down for my interview and stuff and went and told some of my stories and stuff. And – but it messed me up for months, like for months I had nightmares and an like and I was angry and then like I said that’s why like all this – like I cancelled on you the few times and I think I physically made myself sick. Like this time I think part of the reason I’m actually sitting here is because I forgot about it. I was kind of wrapped up in Mother’s Day and then this morning when you phoned it was like kind of like, okay there’s just enough time to kind of get ready and – and it’s because I probably would have been feeling sick again if I would have been thinking about it. (Participant E)
**Triggers**

Three participants advised that certain factors triggered painful reminders of their traumatic past. A wide range of reasons and situations were responsible for this reaction in the participants. Furthermore, a variety of past traumatic events, including addiction, familial violence, domestic abuse, and the IRSS experience, were recounted as a result of experiencing the emotional triggers.

Anybody that’s loud – like if you came at me kind of loud, like, I’d probably feel triggered in our unit if it got too loud because...my brother’s yelling, you know, screaming or you know, everybody hiding, you know, on him. (Participant B)

So, just kind of triggers me – especially intoxicated people, any time. (Participant B)

But for me I’m scared to have a drink because then I might want to get high, that old feeling. (Participant B)

Well when...with my partner...with him, and like whenever we go there – whenever we did go there, you know, it just brought back a lot of memories to him and it bothered him, it bothers him a lot. (Participant D)

Even to talk about it today it’s like it refreshes that whole – all those uncomfortable sad feelings about myself which weren’t even the case. (Participant E)

**Anxiety**

Anxiety, stress, grief, and nervousness were noted as negative emotions occurring in conjunction with flashbacks and triggers. One participant discussed her reluctance to participate in this research because she was fearful that it would dredge up the aforementioned emotions.\(^6\) This participant also described her anxiety as lessening with the passage of time and the addition of counselling and supports.

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\(^6\) The researcher has four years experience working with victims of domestic violence in the Domestic Violence Unit at Family Service Regina. The researcher has also taken training on suicide intervention, cultural sensitivity, and motivational interviewing.
No, I think I like one of the things I’d like to thank you. Because the one thing is like you had no clue about like that it would cause me grief and nervousness and make me feel sick about interviewing and that’s no part of your research part of thing. But I think like I think it needs to be said because the thing is like...sometimes like – like doing all of this and getting this information is so hard to get because it twists people up and it’s such like a hard topic but it’s – it’s needed that people need to break the silence and in order for people to heal or to let go of things you have to go through this. And so thanks for that. And like it took a long time – like now I can talk and I can...I – I let go of a lot of that but it’s still really painful. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 8: Abuser’s Background**

The primary focus of the preceding basic and organizing themes has focussed exclusively on the participants. The eighth basic theme, “Abuser’s Background,” details the personal circumstances of their male abusive partners. Information on their family of origin and IRSS experience are detailed below.

*Abuser’s Circumstances*

Participants provided their observations on the positive and negative aspects of their abuser’s family of origin. Addiction, street life, violence, divorce, and neglect were traumatic experiences endured by their partners. Participants were also able to identify parallels between their background and that of their partner.

It was the same background I pick up again [laughter]. He has suffered through – he has suffered through lots and his parents were divorced and he almost got burned in a fire. And he was raised by his grandmother and he suffered more than I was like. And he couldn’t let go of the past. He couldn’t deal with it. (Participant A)

The guy that I was with at the time his parents were just, just, just as violent if not worse than – than mine and our parents like drank together and whatever so it was all like a big fucked up family [laughter]. (Participant C)

It was pretty obvious and like it wasn’t just him out of the whole bunch and like there was seven of them and they were...I wouldn’t say all violent but I think [inaudible] that most violent or most craziest one out of them all. Like his other two brothers were...not really like violent, violent, like how he was or really
abusive too. But they were the jealous, controlling type too – you know I didn’t really see that part of them but they were. (Participant C)

*Abuser’s Experience in IRSS*

Three participants indicated that their abusive partner had attended the IRSS and that they had experienced physical, emotional, and sexual violence during their stay. Participants went on to discuss the long-term implications and the lasting impact the attendance had on their partner.

He [my partner] was in residential school for six years. (Participant A)

My partner has – was in residential school for...for his little young years. From like seven or I think it was age seven to...ten. Like...sexual abuse when he first went there alone and, you know, he was there by himself all the time. And...he used to be, you know, woken up in the middle of the night to be like, you know, bothered and his...the security guy or whatever. Being in residential I think that’s where most of the drinking problem comes from and...like with him not being able to trust a woman and not being able to have any trust in a woman becomes – comes from when – from being in residential. (Participant D)

To my understanding he did, I think the way – I think his was though...he went to the day school I know he went to – yeah he actually did go to residence. He wasn’t one to really tell a lot about what all happened to him. It was more how he felt about things that happened that I actually learned and...and more and lots of times in side way like where him and his buddies are talking and – and they’re drinking and you’re – you kind of happen upon it and you kind of catch parts of it. And then...that I learned some things and I was – because like I said I think it messed up so many people. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 9: Community Violence**

“Community Violence,” the ninth basic theme, focuses on the participants’ community of origin and the abusive behaviours occurring within. There was a general consensus amongst the participants that violence was rife within their communities and that this was often caused by addiction and criminal groups. Three issues discussed comprise this basic theme: violence in the community, gangs, and negative peer
influence. Participants provided their commentary on each of the aforementioned topics and the results are provided below.

Violence in the Community

Various types of violence where noted as occurring within the participants’ communities. One participant observed that abuse most often occurred when individuals were drinking. Another participant advised that she felt domestic related incidents were the most frequently occurring. Violence in the community was ultimately equated with dysfunction within the community as a whole.

And I witness other violence with other homes and other people. I especially I find it when they was – there was drinking. (Participant A)

There is...more incidents it seems of...domestic violence related issues. (Participant E)

I also see that a lot of dysfunction in the aboriginal communities. (Participant E)

Gangs

Gang affiliation was a major source of violent behaviour in the community. Participants discussed gang feuds, new member recruitment, and the overall negativity that these associations created. One participant talked about the fear she experienced as a result of her partner’s gang involvement, both during and after her relationship ended.

But now, today, the reserve life ain’t any different from city life. It’s just as violent, gangs, you know, it’s better out there for them to, you know, cause their drama in [the city] and then chill on the reserve, you know. (Participant B)

Both my kid’s dads are like [in] gangs – like you know, sort of up there in the gang life and so, you know, and it made me really scared. (Participant C)

Negative Peer Influence

One participant provided insight into her downward spiral into violent relationships, drug addiction, and poverty. She advised that this negative turn of events
was spurred by a need to escape her overprotective parents. Consequently, she began spending time with individuals who lived a harmful lifestyle and started to replicate their behaviours.

And when...I disappeared for a few days, hang out with bad people, I guess, you know, because they had no curfews, you know, stuff like that. So, I think that’s where I started acting out in the wrong ways. (Participant B)

**Basic Theme 10: Substance Abuse**

The tenth basic theme outlines drug and alcohol abuse amongst the participants, their domestic partners, family, friends, and community members. Participants provided extensive commentary in relation to this basic theme easily making it the most discussed topic in this research. “Substance Abuse,” came together as a basic theme as a result of seven issues discussed including, familial alcohol abuse, binge drinking, abuser substance abuse, mistrust of alcohol, drug use, health issues resulting from substance abuse, and co-dependency.

_Familial Alcohol Abuse_

Alcohol abuse was a common occurrence within the participants’ childhood homes. The expectation of violence was often associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol. Binge drinking was noted as another aspect of the familial pattern of alcohol use.

I think when weekends kind of came up they were just gone. Like, for like a three-four day binge. So, all, I guess during my older siblings my parents drank a lot – I didn’t know that. (Participant B)

But yeah, no, we could always, always expect like fighting and lots of violent stuff to happen [when they were drinking]. (Participant C)

I do know that they drank a lot because being with them and...going home for visits – like leaving Elaine’s and having to go home. My memories at home with my biological family are pretty much drinking ones and I didn’t like it. Because I
remember my parents being drunk and...my family drinking, my grandmother and yeah, I remember being pretty small and with a couple of my cousins being around drunks. (Participant D)

Sometimes – like sometimes they would go out [drinking] and we wouldn’t know where they would be or if they were safe or if they were like – like. Every...every weekend I would always just expect like in my mind I would always play over and over again how, okay if I get the news that my mom is dead then, you know, this is what I am going to do, like. And it just played over and over for about – well years. (Participant C)

My dad would leave. He would be gone with like his friends and things. So like I don’t really remember seeing my dad really drinking but my dad coming home after he was drunk. (Participant E)

Participant Alcohol Abuse

Four of the five participants indicated that they had suffered from alcohol addiction at some point in their life. Participants talked about how they would use alcohol to mask unwanted feelings and to cope with the reality of their traumas. The aforementioned alcohol abuse was varied amongst the participants; occurring at different frequencies and time periods.

I’ll say about 15, 15 years old [when I started drinking]. After while I just started doing that [drinking] and I started hurting other people and started hurting myself. That’s when I didn’t like it. Like with drinking when you’re not, like really like, when you’re kind of like, you just like come to the point like where who gives a shit and you know, it just seems that way. (Participant A)

So then I would go crazy [if he was out of town], you know I’d go see all my friends, I’d end up drinking. You know what I mean? (Participant B)

And then so when I was 16 and like [because] I was – by the time I was 16 I was already drinking, like I probably had my first drink of alcohol when I was 12 maybe. So I had already been drinking for a while so when I had gotten pregnant all that stopped. (Participant C)

And...yeah, we drank a lot at the beginning of our relationship. We were drunk all the time. (Participant D)
*Abuser Substance Abuse*

The partners of the participants would frequently use drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism, as a tool to get by in social settings, and a barrier so that they could avoid experiencing the emotions associated with painful memories. Participants noted an increase in alcohol consumption led to an escalation of domestic violence in the home.

I find him really abusing alcohol to survive the trauma. Not dealing with it – I find it [inaudible] that’s why we tried, like you know, we try, like you know, working out our relationship and stuff like that. (Participant A)

So from there, I didn’t drink as much but he was a drug addict. If I got rid of his drugs that’s when it would start. Like, it would be a big fight. (Participant B)

I always knew like expected every time I would see my parents drinking or whatever that like my mom – chances are my mom was probably going to get a licking that night. (Participant C)

Just problems that were happening while he drank, I guess. (Participant D)

*Mistrust of Alcohol*

One participant noted a wariness of alcohol after witnessing the catastrophic impact of alcohol use on her parents and childhood home. This participant talked at length about her father beating her mother while intoxicated and his eventual death from alcohol-related cirrhosis. As a result, she limited her alcohol consumption as an adult to avoid repeating the aforementioned situation.

Alcohol I’d say I think I have a fear of it. Like...I’ve always only really been a social drinker but like...I think I really have a fear of it. Like I think – I think it could be something that really could be – could be a factor if I let it and I think but instead I have always had like this...everybody, you know, like young people go out and drink or whatever kind of thing and it’s like...I remember everybody telling me, how come you won’t have drinks, like why won’t you. I think like instead – and I would always be like, I can’t, and like, you know, no I don’t – I don’t drink. When people are all having their big drinks with Grey Cup and everything else I’d be like have my couple drinks and then I’d be just like weary. (Participant E)
Drug Use

Three participants provided detailed observations on personal, familial, and community drug use. Various types of drugs and methods of using were covered in discussions relating to this specific issue discussed.

My brother became a drug addict. (Participant B)

So for – I spent probably after that relationship I probably spent 10 years just getting high every day. Like all the time. (Participant B)

Valium, tranquilizers, cocktail drugs. Like you know, like if I was going to the bar it would be rape drugs, you know, stuff like that. Mushrooms, R & T, acid on weekends...what else – weed, lots of weed, lots of pills. (Participant B)

Because now, like...like needle doping and stuff like that was introduced on the reserve so now a lot of people went that way. So like I don’t know if it - like I don’t know, so it sounds so sad to say it out loud but I mean like alcohol was the main thing that gets everyone like crazy violent, right. But they started like needle doping it was like they were more calm and it wasn’t like that so it was I don’t know it just a little bit. (Participant C)

Health Issues Resulting from Substance Abuse

Consequently, a number of health issues resulted from the aforementioned substances abuses. One participant described her personal health and how her liver, kidneys, and brain function were negatively impacted by drug use. Conversely, another participant attributed the death of her father to long-term alcohol abuse.

My body couldn’t take any more pills. It was affecting my liver, kidneys, stuff like that. Like I just stopped eating, stopped drinking. The side effect that I got from drugs would be forgetfulness. I do suffer from certain things now. So I have to be really – like I have to shut my phone off. If I hear my phone going off my mind will be like – and I’ll forget, you know what I mean? And I’ll forget I’m driving. I have to retrain myself all the time. (Participant B)

My dad died of cirrhosis, he was an alcoholic. (Participant E)
Co-Dependency

Finally, one participant provided insight into the co-dependent relationship her mother had with her father. This participant indicated that her mother enabled her father in his addiction and that this ultimately led to resentment and dysfunction within the family home.

I know, I feel like my mom did try and I feel like she became I don’t know that word for dysfunction life, but co-dependency. (Participant A)

Basic Theme 11: Participants’ Personal Parenting Approaches

Teen pregnancy, single parenting, participant children in government care, and parenting skills are four issues discussed which comprise the eleventh basic theme. Participants provided their observations and commentary on their own personal parenting experiences. Each of these is discussed below.

Teen Pregnancy

Three participants provided insight into their experience of becoming a parent during teenage years. Dysfunctional factors, particularly, violence in the home and a significant age gap in the relationship, were noted as a contributing factors to the aforementioned experience.

And then...I got pregnant at 17 and then I had my daughter. (Participant B)

You know, I’m not sure [inaudible] Well at about the end of my childhood about the, you know, about the violence that I had seen. So when I had – it’s – when I was 16 I had gotten pregnant. (Participant C)

I was like 18 and we ended up having a child together. (Participant D)
Single Parent

All of the participants who had experienced pregnancy in their teen years subsequently went on to be a single parent. This is not to indicate that teen pregnancy necessarily leads to a single parent home but rather, that they are related in some way.

My mom was the only one looking after us for about, about with six kids. (Participant A)

When I had my baby I stayed with my parents for a bit. (Participant B)

You know, went through my pregnancy, gave birth, and had my child on my own. (Participant C)

Participants’ Children in Government Care

The involvement of Social Services with the family unit was discussed by two participants. In both situations, the participants’ children had been apprehended and taken into care due to inappropriate parenting practices and an unsafe home environment. Participants detailed their efforts to have their children returned to their care.

My oldest one always been in my care until he was about almost eight years old, after that I started having kids and they were in their care off and on. Off and on like that for – until about a couple years ago. But ever since they have been back into my care, they have stayed in my care. (Participant A)

Yeah I’ve been to SOFIA house and they are helping me with – helping me get my – my boy back and working with me and everything. (Participant D)

Learning Parenting Skills

A lack of parenting skills was an emergent theme in the literature review and the data for this research. Participants noted their difficulties in appropriately parenting their children and attributed this to the fact that they grew up in the IRSS and not in the care of their parents. The importance of parenting programs and involvement in school programs were highlighted and designated as critical components in building skills.
I have to re-become parenting to myself to re-teach myself because in the residential schools when they were taking kids away the parents didn’t have a choice and they were just like grabbing kids away from their parenting skills and after the kids were all taken away I felt like they took their parenting skills away from them. (Participant A)

And – and they just pass it on, like you know what they knew and like, even myself when I first became parent I didn’t knew anything about parenting I just like. (Participant A)

I think that there is a big need for parenting skills and...and I think that like in terms of literacy and terms of education and the education system and school system that we need a lot more stuff to be able to find where parents have a bigger role with things and have...feel secure in – in taking on that and – and being more active in – in their kid’s educations and stuff. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 12: Mental Health Issues**

The final basic theme outlines a number of mental health concerns that came up in this research. Participants reflected on FASD, self harm, and suicide and commented on how these issues have impacted them.

*Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*

One participant reflected on the lack of education about FASD. This participant indicated that the aforementioned deficiencies have resulted in a general carelessness surrounding alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and girls not knowing...realizing the impact that they could have on their children because...they weren’t necessarily taught – you can’t think – what you put into your body is what you’re feeding the child, like as an example. (Participant E)

*Self Harm*

Self harm, particularly cutting, was an abusive habit noted by one participant. This participant advised that her mother would often self harm and use substances to cope with her violent relationship. In this situation, the various problems compounded one another which ultimately exacerbated the impact of each.
My mom – early on my mom was...like – she would like get beat up and on top of that she was like cutting herself. Yeah and it just – it like the cutting stopped or whatever but I mean the abuse didn't and I don't know like really how she, yeah, just put up with it for so long. (Participant C)

Suicide

Suicide personally impacted three participants in this research. One participant talked about her struggle with depression and how this led to the contemplation of suicide. Two other participants described the losses they felt when their friends and family members had chosen to take their own life.

I was like, you know, I came to the point where I wanted to suicide myself. I don’t want to live anymore, I don’t want to live, you know. I came to that, like you know, because I was going through so much abuse. Just like reliving the past again. (Participant A)

One of my sisters had committed suicide so there is four of us now, yeah. (Participant C)

Like it was – it was so – so weird how the whole thing happened and then I seen how many of my friends commit suicide after the whole thing of them...finally taking their cases to court and things and then killing themselves. (Participant E)

Summary of Organizing Theme 2

“Dysfunction in Family Life,” the second basic theme, outlines issues identified by the participants in their family of origin. This organizing theme encompassed the largest number of basic themes and lower level issues discussed making it the biggest organizing theme in this research. Participants provided commentary on a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, historical factors, abuse in the childhood home, substance abuse, community violence, and mental health issues. Family history, particularly attendance at the IRSS, had a distinctly negative impact within the family unit. Students who had grown up in the IRSS missed out on the opportunity to be nurtured, loved, and to learn parenting skills. Furthermore, former residents of the IRSS
expressed an inability to experience and convey emotions in a nurturing manner. As such, participants advised of lack of affection in their childhood home. A consensus amongst the participants was that they encountered difficulties in parenting either because their parents were absent in the family home or because they had spent their childhood in the IRSS.

The cascading traumas of the IRSS also had a debilitating impact on former students in terms of addiction, maintaining healthy intimate relationships, and the ability to express their emotions. The aforementioned factors created deep instabilities within the family units of both the participants and their abusive partners. Exposure to domestic violence in childhood led to feelings of distress and confusion amongst the participants. This trauma also affected the participants’ understandings of gender roles and acceptable treatment in domestic relationships. This experience is paralleled by that of the participants’ abusive partner in that they watched their father abuse their mother and went on to repeat the same behaviours. The culmination of the three aforementioned experiences breeds the attitude that violence is an acceptable manner in which to handle conflict. If violence is all that has been modeled in the childhood home then it may be possible that these behaviours will be accepted as normal and subsequently repeated.

Participants advised that this internalization eventually manifested into a repetition of their parents violent relationship in adulthood. Moreover, participants commented on the fact that they had established relationships with abusive men who had come from the same background and held the same beliefs about violence in the home. Along with witnessing violence in the family home, participants were also subjected to a number of physical, sexual, and psychological abuses. Participants described the
emotional scars caused by constant yelling and name calling, bruises from physical assault, and the deep psychological wounds and feelings associated with betrayal. In all of these situations, parents and other adults in authoritative positions ignored their obligation to care for these children. Moreover, these individuals betrayed the trust of the participants in the moment when they chose to react violently towards an innocent child. Again, this experience perpetuated the belief that violence was an acceptable practice and a mode through which to manage conflict. Regardless of the volume of trauma occurring, participants and their families expressed a refusal to discuss traumatic experiences. As such, this reluctance may be attributable to that fact that former students have not dealt with the anxiety and stress associated with this experience or they do not want to stir up negative emotions.

Attitudes conducive to violence were widespread throughout the participants’ home community. The presence of pervasive attitudes conducive to violence considerably affects all individuals within the community. Furthermore, the normalization of violence inadvertently ensures that abuse will continue to plague subsequent generations. This occurrence is attributable to the fact that the IRSS affected a large portion of the First Nations population and today’s generation is experiencing the intergenerational effects. One participant continually stated that dysfunction was a breeding ground for subsequent dysfunction. This participant was aware of the dysfunction in her life and the larger cycle of violence that she was caught up in. However, there were several intersecting layers of dysfunction present in her situation including systemic oppression, intergenerational trauma, community violence, and the
abuse occurring within her intimate relationship which made it difficult for her to break free from the dysfunction she spoke of.

Overall, substance abuse was one of the most widely discussed issues in this research due to its varied and multifaceted impacts. Participants advised that substance abuse exacerbated the severity, frequency, and impact of the various types of violence previously discussed. Addiction and partying led to the careless neglect of children and to an eventual role reversal whereby the participants were forced into a parental role. Participants described this experience as challenging and indicated that they also had to mature quickly, robbing them of their childhood. In extreme situations, it was necessary for the Ministry of Social Services to become involved to remove the child from the situation. Participants advised that drugs and alcohol were utilized as coping mechanisms to mask the pain associated with past traumas and to avoid experiencing the associated emotions. Mental health issues comprise the final basic theme within the discussion on dysfunction in family life. Participants provided insight into the connection between past traumas, including the IRSS, and current mental health concerns.

**Organizing Theme 3: Trauma**

Table 4 provides a summary of the topics arising in the analytic process by listing the issues discussed, basic themes, and overarching organizing theme. “Trauma” was identified as an organizing theme based on participant responses regarding loss, pain, and anger.
Table 4: Organizing Theme 3: Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Discussed</th>
<th>Basic Theme</th>
<th>Organizing Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
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<td>TRAUMA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Death of a Family Member</td>
<td>Loss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Death of a Participant’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murder of a Family Member</td>
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</tbody>
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| Unsafe                      | Pain        |                  |
| Isolation                   |             |                  |
| Ashamed                     |             |                  |
| Withdraw                    |             |                  |
| Numb                        |             |                  |
| Temper                      | Anger       |                  |
| Blame                       |             |                  |

**Basic Theme 1: Loss**

This basic theme provides a context for understanding the trauma experienced by participants as a result of a loss in their life, separate from the IRSS experience.

Participants reflected on major losses throughout their lifetime and the according impact that it had on them. This basic theme came together as a result of a number of issues discussed which emerged in the data including abortion, death of a family member, death of participant’s child, and murder of a family member.

**Abortion**

One participant recounted her experience in considering an abortion. She advised that she later decided against going through with the procedure and shared her thoughts around why she made her decision.

And I left and I said I was going to like, I you know, planned to get an abortion. And just knowing that, you know, there’s nothing like should have happened, you know, nothing, and that ended up sort of being my miracle baby where I didn’t get an abortion. (Participant C)
Death of a Family Member

Three participants advised that they had experienced the death of an immediate family member. Participants were mixed in their responses when responding to how they were impacted by the loss.

Because there’s a sister between me and my next oldest sister. There was – her name was Doty. But apparently my parents were on a binge and on the reserve back in the day, before water, rain water wasn’t good...with all the acid and stuff. They used to have pails, like maybe a little bit bigger than the average garbage can. So they put it on the step and collect, you know, collect rain. So I guess apparently my sister dropped her baby rattle in it and my other siblings were playing around in the house, you know. And by the time they realized she went in for the rattle, she drowned. (Participant B)

Well she’s [my mother] passed away now in 2003. (Participant D)

And my dad was a really mean man...he died when I was four and I think sadly enough I think my creator had enough pity on my mom to take my dad’s life. (Participant E)

Death of Participant’s Child

One participant reflected on the death of her child. She discussed how the trauma relating to that incident impacted her emotionally and the toll it took on her personal relationships.

And yeah, and I think that was a really big thing of at the time because we had also lost a child in 2006 – he was killed in an...train accident and...and we just couldn’t get back from that point. (Participant E)

Murder of a Family Member

Finally, one participant indicated that her father had murdered her aunt. She described this as a double loss because she experienced the loss of her aunt but also of her father as he went to jail for the crime that he committed.

My dad – my real dad had...started going with my mom’s sister and he actually killed her. And so my dad went to jail for years and years and years and years and years. (Participant C)
Basic Theme 2: Pain

Participants expressed that they encountered these emotions as a result of IRSS experiences, abuse in the family system, and domestic violence. This theme is premised on the following issues discussed: unsafe, isolation, ashamed, withdraw, and numb.

Unsafe

When asked about her experience in the IRSS, one participant responded that she often felt unsafe in the school. She indicated that fellow students would follow her when she was out running in an attempt to harm her. Additionally, she spoke to how the aforementioned experience impacted her sense of safety as an adult.

And you’re just trying to run and for me like I think I used running as an escape and to kind of – and yet it’s like they took it away and so everything seemed unsafe. (Participant E)

And then like...you just don’t feel safe, you feel like no matter where you are you’re not safe, no matter who you’re with you’re not safe. So like, and then that carries on like because I shouldn’t have felt like even like later when I had my husband that he would hurt me and it wouldn’t be safe right, and I did, and it was like, like I said, because touched a certain way or – or something that just came up from it and then it carries on like to affect you. (Participant E)

Isolation

Two participants advised that they felt as though they were isolated by their abusive situation. One participant indicated that her isolation stemmed from an inability to talk to others about her experience and the other participant stated that her abusive partner physically isolated her from her friends and family.

From all these abuse that I have suffered that have keep me down and kept me isolated. (Participant A)

No, no he would [hit me right there] – and like so everybody knew, like don’t talk to [her], don’t talk to him either because it’s like you know, like it was really bad. (Participant C)
Ashamed

One participant reflected on the sexual abuse she suffered in childhood at the hands of a neighbour. She described feelings of shame and an inability to deal with the pain associated with this trauma.

I never dealt with it [sexual abuse] because I was scared or I don’t know, ashamed – ashamed of it or wasn’t strong enough to deal with it. (Participant A)

Withdraw

One participant identified that she had a tendency to withdraw from others in situations where she was required to move outside of her emotional comfort zone.

I was really afraid of people because I might get hurt and I really kinda withdraw myself from people around me and everything and I just because really, that’s how I become – myself, like a zombie person. (Participant A)

Numb

A lack of feelings and an unwillingness to process emotions was reflected on by one participant. She indicated that she had reached a point where she had experienced so much trauma that she no longer had the emotional capacity to effectively deal with her feelings.

I didn’t – I just like I didn’t have no...feelings. Just like I didn’t care, like, just like I was a human without no heart. That’s how I see myself. I have like no feelings, no nothing. I just like, it didn’t matter if I hurt anybody or I didn’t think back on like, you know, it’s just like I just walked. Just like a walking zombie. (Participant A)

Basic Theme 3: Anger

The final basic theme describes the participants’ reflections and perceptions on anger. This basic theme was formed based on two issues discussed that came up in the data: temper and blame. Two participants described their observations of these emotions while in the childhood home and provided insight into how it affects their lives today.
Temper

One participant noted that her father was quick to anger and had a hot temper. This observation was made by the participant while she was living in her childhood home.

But I noticed that my dad had a really fast temper. That he explodes easily, yeah he gets mad easily. (Participant A)

Blame

In discussing her struggles as an adult, one participant identified that her mother was responsible for her inability in dealing with emotions and lack of communication skills. The participant briefly discussed co-dependency and how it became a crippling factor in her personal development.

She became that [co-dependent] and – and today, all my brothers and sisters we blame our mom so much for our lives and that really, like you know, everything we do, that we try, we never succeed or we have relationship problems, stuff like that. (Participant A)

Summary of Organizing Theme 3

The third organizing theme focused on the various anxieties, stresses, and traumas associated with the IRSS, dysfunction in family life, abuse in childhood, and domestic violence. Participants provided commentary on three basic themes: loss, pain, and anger. The emotions associated with loss were characterized by the participants as heartbreaking and tragic. All of the participants emphasized that they encountered difficulties in dealing with these emotions and the according traumas. Participants advised that these emotions did not occur in isolation from others and that they experienced many emotions in coordination with one another following the traumatic incident. The aforementioned pain manifested in a number of ways including anger, sadness, and numbness.
Participants indicated that they reacted to traumas in different ways depending on the situation and the according context. Extensive detail was provided in relation to loss, pain, and anger indicating that the participants had experienced extensive trauma throughout their lifetime.

Organizing Theme 4: Domestic Violence

The table below displays the salient topics that emerged through the analytic process in relation to the organizing theme, “Domestic Violence.” Table 5 displays the issues discussed, the larger basic themes, and finally, the overarching organizing theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Discussed</th>
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<th>Organizing Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rushing into a Relationship</td>
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### Basic Theme 1: Power and Control

Power imbalances, particularly the need for one partner to have control over the other, comprise the fundamental basis of violence in intimate partner relationships. The first basic theme, “Power and Control,” outlines the various intimidation tactics, manipulative actions, and red flags often present in situations involving domestic violence.
Rushing into a Relationship

Two participants discussed a tendency to rush into a relationship to find a sense of companionship that they felt had been missing from their childhood days. One participant advised that she had noted a sense of urgency amongst her female family members and friends to be in a relationship. This sense of desperation often led to partnerships with abusive men.

Well, when I first got into a relationship, I went into a relationship, I felt like I ran. I ran to find a home for myself. (Participant A)

I can see how easily...you know, the women in my life or and in so many others where they seek out, you know, something they want so bad that hasn’t actually like been established first so all their first relationships like with males end up being like just some stupid abusive guy. (Participant C)

Red Flags

Indicators of abuse, often referred to as red flags, were mentioned by one participant. This participant indicated that she had noticed these signs in a previous abusive relationship and, as a result, was quickly able to identify red flags in her subsequent relationships.

I have been on and off and off in my relationship for a few years...but yeah no, when I had last week, you know, things were fine but after you know talking a bit about like domestic violence and abuse in the home...I start noticing my own sort of flags going up. (Participant C)

Like I mean that’s what you know and I told my sisters, like I’m like, you know, like – like I’m pretty sure he said this, but it – you know, then it would be just little things and I felt it, you know, in my gut that this was, you know, is not...like these are little bit familiar of feelings, so you know, I shut it down before...you know, before anything, you know happened to me further or whatever. (Participant C)
Dysfunctional Participant Domestic Relationship

Participants explained various types of dysfunction within their intimate partner relationships. In some instances, the relationship was described as “ugly” and in others a large age gap was identified as the problematic aspect. One participant attributed dysfunction to a pregnancy that occurred outside of a relationship.

I’ve been through some very ugly relationships. (Participant C)

Well my second child was not...you know...it wasn’t...it wasn’t conceived out of a solid relationship or anything like that it was me and a friend from my childhood who was knowingly just as fucked up as...the last one. (Participant C)

And he was like a much older man than me – like real, real old and...like he was like really old. (Participant D)

Manipulate

Manipulation was a tactic used by men to keep their female partners in the abusive relationship. One abuser withheld information regarding a university acceptance from a participant so that she would be unable to leave him to complete post-secondary education. Another abuser was emotionally abusive and made a participant feel as though she could not parent her child without him around. In both situations, participants were manipulated in such a way that they felt they did not have any other option but to stay with their abusive partner.

The reason that I moved to Saskatoon was I got accepted into university out there. And I was waiting for my acceptance letter but it didn’t come in. So my sister called on the phone and used all – used all my passwords and found out I was accepted but that I was past the deadline. Because he was hiding my mail and he didn’t want me to go to school and be better you know, because he didn’t graduate anything. So I was just choked. (Participant B)

Manipulated me because I didn’t know – you know with him being so much older and me being young and not knowing anything really. Like just how to be a mom. (Participant D)
So the first time...with the first relationship the only reason I did stay was because of my son, it was because of Jared. And I guess being manipulated into – into thinking I needed to be with Jared’s dad. (Participant D)

*Control*

Participants discussed situations where their abusive partner attempted to restrict their freedom. These abusers attempted to gain control using intimidation, threats, and physical violence. One participant indicated that her partner became more jealous when she got pregnant and another advised that her partner tried to control her life while he was incarcerated.

Really, really, really violent and...so yeah when I got pregnant he became very violent, controlling, jealous. Like he would always be incarcerated and I – he was like basically started controlling me from jail, so I – yeah. And so I didn’t – like I was obviously too scared to start another relationship or anything like that with anybody. (Participant C)

And he was doing that to me, trying to control me, trying to beat – he beat on me. (Participant A)

*Intimidate*

The threat of harm was an emotionally abusive tactic frequently used by one participant’s partner. In this situation, there was never any physical violence. Instead, her partner would make gestures and talk to her in such a way that led her to believe the threat of physical violence was imminent. She stated that the presumed threat was almost worse than being physically abused.

And...but he was not one to really – so it seemed like at times he would kind of intimidate me but he wouldn’t hurt me – like more in that – more that he would say were the things like...more emotional. More that we would say...you and your school it wrecked everything and it affected us so much. (Participant E)

And say...I gotta get out of here, and then leave and then it would...and then it would make me feel like something bigger would happen out of all of it all the time and it wouldn’t. But it would leave that feeling so like...that would happen and then like it – and...that was mostly it. Like my husband wasn’t one to really
hit me or anything or like not like a physical abuse or anything he...he just never really was like that.  (Participant E)

*Violent*

“Violent” was an adjective used by two participants to describe their partners. In both instances, the abusive partners committed ongoing acts of physical violence on their female partners.

Then I met – I met...my now common law partner, Kevin, and...that’s the one I was telling you about, like with the that went through a lot of...residential school or whatever and he’s the – like now he’s like real rank.  (Participant D)

So then, I – I was with for about three years or two years and he was violent, you know, just violent.  (Participant B)

Just violent, not like any other abuse, just violent mentally, jealousy.  (Participant B)

*Cycle of Violence in DV Relationship*

Three participants noted the cyclical nature of domestic violence in their intimate partner relationship. The tension building phase, violent outburst, and honeymoon phase were all identified as recurring stages in their abusive relationships. Further to that, participants also noted that their subsequent relationships seemed to fall into the cycle and that the violence would repeat itself.

After that, it just seems like to go back into the same relationships almost similar like relationships, but not as bad as like the first one.  (Participant A)

There was just like...we were just going through the honeymoon stage they call it. It was just like living that cycle, like once and every couple weeks. We were just living like that. We lived like that for a couple years.  (Participant A)

Yeah, but I can see how it [cycle of violence], you know, continues.  (Participant C)

Like well first when we first started going together he was like really nice and really good and he wasn’t abusive to me. And then after we started...dating more and getting to know each other a little bit more he would start like, you know,
beating me up whenever we drank and we drank a lot at the beginning of our relationship, yeah. (Participant D)

Yeah [I did note the cycle of violence in my relationship], because like, well I – that was the first time I ever tried leaving him and then went back and ended getting beat up really bad, right? So I never tried it again. (Participant D)

Well of course it started off like where it was...who are you going with? Why are you doing this? When are you going? Like it was started you know where it was just the I guess the walking on egg shells part of it but I mean he wouldn’t – like he wouldn’t punch me in the face or whatever just as openly as the last guy did. (Participant C)

And then it was all – all of us to blame for everything that he was going through. And...and so it was like we would be walking on eggshells because we were scared like to say something wrong or do something wrong. And...and that was mostly brought on all because like of...his bad experiences and then blaming and trying to take it out on someone else. (Participant E)

*DV Abuser Threatening Suicide*

One participant provided insight into a situation where her abusive ex-partner had threatened to take his life after an argument that they had had. This was another ploy used in an effort to secure control over their female partner.

Like he would call me at home in the middle of the night, well I’m going to go jump in front of my train, you know, I’m going kill myself and those kind of things used to make me jump up. And I said, okay well if that’s what you want to do to yourself and your daughter, I was like okay, I’ll just tell her you decided to jump in front of a train when she’s 10. (Participant B)

*DV Abuser Forcing Participant out of Home*

After a heated argument, one participant and her child were forced to move out of their home by her abusive partner. This participant was faced with many barriers as she was left without a home and didn’t have anywhere else where she was able to stay.

And so he told me I had one hour – because everything was in his name – I had one hour to get my stuff out of his place. So I took the most valuable and moved it into the alley. And my sister and her husband got there and they helped me move lots of stuff. And then whatever I could fit on my mom’s truck. I just left,
because it was just – I couldn’t go to school and all that, you know, everything I did. (Participant B)

*DV Abuser Forcing Participant to Return Home*

Alternatively, one participant described a situation where her partner forced her to return home after she had initially fled the violence. Her abusive partner found out where she was hiding and used manipulative techniques to coax her to return home.

After I left him for about a like week he would come find me and wanted me to go home so I went home. That’s another game he is playing with me so he can say, I need you, I need to go back, I can’t do this anymore. But I came to some point where I just want to pick up a phone and I yeah, like you know, calling him. (Participant D)

*Abuser Intimidation in the Community*

Intimidation tactics were not limited solely to relations between victim and abuser. One participant advised that her partner used his position and cultural influence within the area to scare members of the community. This participant had a difficult time finding supports to assist her in fleeing her relationship because community members were fearful of her partner and refused to become involved.

So I started planning – you know even when I pressed charges against him...it was horrible. Because when we had to go to court basically my Indian workers would back out because they were scared of him because of ceremony wise. (Participant B)

You know everybody else, well we can’t help you, I can have counselling sessions with you Anna, but I can’t be seen in public with you, you know, getting shunned, like, you know, nobody. (Participant B)

Nope, I was getting back stabbed because those people would go run, tell certain people. So all the time my ex would know one step ahead what I was up to. (Participant B)
Impact of DV Today

A discussion of the immediate effects of domestic violence was provided by the participants. However, the effects of this violence can be long lasting and far reaching. One participant talked about the implications of her past experience with domestic violence on her future. She advised that she was unable to finish school due to her abusive partner and often experienced violent flashbacks.

So that’s why I didn’t finish school. Because of the – the abuses of what I had had in ten years...it just shuts my learning down. Yeah, yeah, because it makes me feel like you remind me of my ex. You know, in my face. Like, that’s all I see, right, so. (Participant B)

Basic Theme 2: Emotional Abuse in DV Relationship

The second basic theme, “Emotional Abuse in DV Relationship,” focuses primarily on the psychological, mental, and cultural types of violence that occur in domestic relationships. This basic theme came together as a result of six issues discussed including, harassment/stalking, cultural abuse, minds games, mental abuse, sabotage, and an abuser taking his frustrations out on his victim. These are discussed below.

Harassment/Stalking

Unwanted communication, constant harassment, and repeated following constituted examples of stalking behaviours. One participant experienced the aforementioned treatment after she ended her relationship with her violent partner and moved to a different city. She expressed frustration in the fact that he would go to great lengths to find her and was persistent in his efforts.

You know, but that didn’t do much either, you know, because he would go to court, go do his jail time get out and be right back on my balcony. So it was just like non-stop, so basically in order to get – like when I left Saskatoon he had a good job, everything going on and he still came back to Regina within a week of kicking me out when I could have kept the place, went to university. But he still
shows up in Regina and roams the streets and I’m on the reserve. So literally I had to be with someone else for him to – and for – being with someone else for 6 months after we broke up. That’s how long it took him to register. (Participant B)

_Cultural Abuse_

Spiritual connectedness and traditional practice where identified as important components in the participants’ lives. Through their culture they were able find strength, peace, and guidance. However, the experience of having one’s spirituality disrespected and mocked was described as traumatic and devastating.

And it was just weird because of my teachings, you know, because I grew up in the Cree ways and Dakota ways. So...I knew was everything done was...disrespectful, disloyal, you know. In our ways you have to honor the mothers, you know, the woman. So he was not doing it all and he was always challenging my dad’s teachings indirectly by disrespecting me. I would – well I would have to add cultural abuse into it. (Participant B)

So you have to have a lot of belief to make it work. So if you have non-believers in the ceremony it’s not going to work, right. So you have to be pretty much – you have to pretty much believe in your ways, right. It’s like going to church, you believe in God, you know, and God will work for you as long as you know, you work for him and believe in him. So it’s the same way in the ceremony. So he performed ceremonies. So basically he’s like this in the community, on the pedestal, you know. So whatever he does, he doesn’t do it. You know, he’s a good guy. So I battled a lot with him. Like if people knew we had a fight he would say, she attacked me and scratched my face. So everybody in my community would kind of give me a hard time, right. So nobody believed any of this was going on except for a few people who actually stayed in my house and would witness these outbursts or see him intoxicated or under the influence. So my mom didn’t know for the first 3 years because he hid it so well. And then finally, just towards the end of our relationship, he was just getting careless, like it was starting to come out. But...because he was getting elder status, like teachings and stuff, so people put him up there like really, really high. (Participant B)

_Financial Abuse_

Two participants described situations where they were faced with economic hardship. The abuse occurring in these situations involved a restriction of money or a
complete cut off from financial resources. As a result, these participants were in a
disadvantaged position and encountered difficulty in making ends meet.

And now, like you know, that I’ve been he is cutting me off from all the financial.
(Participant A)

Second one says if I ever take him for child support he will...quit because he has
like a good paying job and doesn’t help worth shit. And...and because he was like
– like, like he was you know...like pushed a lot of drugs back in the day, you
know, made lots of money, and whatever. And I said, you know, threatened child
care – or child support a few times or whatever. And he was like, if you take me
for child support I will quit my job and be a drug dealer again. (Participant C)

Mind Games

Participants described situations where their partners would manipulate
collusions, dominate arguments, and be verbally abusive. The aforementioned efforts
were intended to manipulate the relationship and to blame the non-abusive partner for
any perceived wrong doing. Participants advised that they were made to feel as though
they were crazy and began to believe that they were responsible for the dysfunction in
their relationship. Unfounded accusations of unfaithfulness were another form of
emotional abuse experienced by one participant. This participant advised that her partner
would often accuse her of having relations with other males when this wasn’t the case at
all.

And you know, I want to tell him, like you know, I want to. But when I go to that
drop-in on Wednesday and all these power and control and the mind games. That
even mind games going on at home, me, I was living in an abusive relationship, I
didn’t realize it. (Participant A)

Like, you know, he made me think and feel that I couldn’t do it on my own – I
needed him there for Jared. And he would always use like...like well nobody is
going to help you, you know, and you have a kid and all this stuff. Yeah with the
first relationship because – just because he was so much older than me, right and
he knew – he knew how to play his whatever against me. (Participant D)
And...like just making accusing me of being with other people while I wasn’t with him and that’s how – it wasn’t like that at all though. And we got into a fight about, you know, who I was with or if I was with anybody and blah, blah, blah. (Participant D)

*Sabotage*

One participant described a situation where her ex-partner had set out to ruin her life following a violent break up. This participant had fled her abusive partner and was attempting to move on and live a life free from abuse. Her ex-partner would go to great lengths to destroy the positive aspects of her life.

So it was like no he would do anything and everything to try and, you know, to sabotage what – any sort of good thing that I’m doing in my own life. (Participant C)

*Take it Out on Me*

In some situations, abusers chose to take their frustrations out on their victim in lieu of expressing their emotions in a healthy way. Violent behaviours, both physical and psychological, would be triggered by incidents unrelated to the victim.

You know whenever something would happen or make him mad or like little things that would trigger him he would take it out on me. (Participant D)

Like if...like, I don’t know how to explain. Like if things didn’t go his way, the way he wanted and got mad it was my fault. (Participant D)

**Basic Theme 3: Physical Abuse in DV Relationship**

Physical abuse was the most commonly discussed form of domestic violence discussed in the participant interviews. The third basic theme came together as a result of various forms of assaultive behaviours including slapping, punching, pushing, pinching, throwing, forcible confinement, and sexual abuse. Additionally, participants provided details on situations where their abusive partner caused physical damage to their property.
**Physical Contact**

Participants spoke about situations where a physical altercation had occurred within their relationship. These participants indicated that there were several types of physical violence present in their relationship including, but not limited to, slapping, pushing, and pinching. The aforementioned abuses were indicated to be co-occurring in some situations and occurring in isolation in others.

Because like I used to get beat up from him all the time and...he was really mean to me. (Participant D)

Just became like where he would slap me. (Participant D)

[He] punched me or something and you know, and...basically maybe like every weekend. (Participant D)

Like it come to a point where it was like – like if a guy came by and said like hey to me or gave me a little nod like hey he would be like punch me in the face like it was really bad. (Participant C)

Maybe like pushed me or something but not like full physical beat me up. (Participant D)

I think every person gets to the point where they would push someone or something. That had happened like the couple times where he was just like, get away from me, like you know and like and like you – I – I can’t stand you because you do this and stuff like that. (Participant E)

He would like pinch my arms so I would be all like black under the arms and stuff like that. He was a more subtle sort of abuser. (Participant C)

**Forcible Confinement**

Participants discussed situations where they had been physically restricted by their abusers. Both participants felt a sense of helplessness when they were faced with the impossibility of escape.

Because...once he tried to lock me and his two baby nephews that I didn’t even know where in the house...and try and burn down the house, right. (Participant B)
Like maybe he like...held me down on the stairs and like – like stuff like that. (Participant D)

*Physical Injury from DV Assault*

Bruises, broken bones, cuts, and scars were the physical ailments suffered by participants as a result of physical violence.

Like broken ribs, dislocated jaw. I’ve got like an inner ear problem on this side. (Participant B)

Like, it was to the point where I couldn’t go to the hospital anymore because I knew the next time I would go – because the police and nurses would you know, then they were calling in the social worker. (Participant B)

*Frequency of DV Assault*

The frequency of physical assault varied between participants. Some participants experienced physical violence only a handful of times during their relationship while others were assaulted on a daily or weekly basis.

Probably I was lucky to get through 7 days [without physical abuse]. It was – it was a bonus if I could. And normally that was if he was out of town travelling. Probably every day [physical abuse]. Like humiliating stuff. (Participant B)

I would say sort of the same thing. Every – every weekend [I was assaulted]. (Participant C)

*Sexual Abuse*

One participant mentioned that she had been sexually abused in her relationship but was hesitant to provide further detail about the circumstances. She did state that she had experienced physical, emotional, and mental abuse in conjunction with the sexual violence.

Physical, emotional, mental...sexual – everything. Like just everything in the world, you know. (Participant B)
Property Damage

The last issue discussed under the third basic theme refers to the destruction and damaged caused to physical property. The participant who talked about property damage was also the participant who experienced the least amount of physical violence. She felt that her partner took out his aggression on their furniture instead of on her.

Physical violence. Everything, you named it. Furniture was breaking and stuff like that. We were just like dogs and cats. (Participant A)

And – and then you can’t even [because] things happen…but like I guess and then I you know he would like knock something off the way. (Participant E)

He never really...he would get mad but he would leave and he would – he would like throw things or whatever. (Participant E)

Basic Theme 4: Verbal Abuse in DV Relationship

“Verbal Abuse in DV Relationship,” came together as a basic theme based on three issues discussed: abusive words, argue, and threaten. Participants in this research advised that the impact of name calling, yelling, and criticism was often worse and longer lasting than that of physical abuse.

Abusive Words

In speaking about verbal abuse, participants characterized the manner in which their partner spoke to them as abusive, cruel, and insulting. Both participants indicated that verbal abuse was the first type of violence they experienced in their relationship and that it gradually escalated from that point.

And we got together and we had so much problems, we started having so much problems. We started having verbal abuse. (Participant A)

The third one was kind of he wasn’t really physically abusing me but so much mind games and a little bit of verbal abuse, not too much. (Participant A)
We would sit there and...you know, I would just basically take his – his verbal abuse and listen to how rotten I made his life and whatever. (Participant D)

Argue

One participant advised that her partner would often go out drinking and later return home intoxicated. During these times, he would attempt to pick arguments with her and would be persistent in his need to fight with her. This participant talked about her efforts to de-escalate the situation by leaving the room and how her abusive partner would follow her to continue the confrontation.

He would go out and drink and come home and try argue or fight with me and then, you know, I was with baby and I didn’t want anything to happen to Jared. So I just like, you know, like try and not talk to him or whatever, you now, just like leave him alone, stay out of his way and he would just like come into the room and just bug and bug, like tell me to come talk to him so I would just – just so he wouldn’t wake up Jared. (Participant D)

Threaten

Threats to cause personal harm or harm to a friend or family members were identified as verbally abusive tactics intended to instill fear in the victims. In some situations, the abusive partner was gang affiliated and would instruct fellow members to threaten the victim.

And but I tried to leave and he would threaten...to hurt my family or you know just to do like some crazy, crazy things. (Participant C)

After that, I kind of always ran into these people or you know, heard stuff or they would be sort of threatening or whatever along the way. (Participant C)

Basic Theme 5: Criminal Justice System

The fifth basic theme focuses on the criminal implications associated with the aforementioned types of violence. Participants provided insight into their experiences with the RCMP and other municipal police forces, violence which resulted in criminal
charges, and the subsequent sentences accorded to these offences. Each of these basic themes is discussed below and the relevant participant quotes are provided.

**RCMP/Police Involvement**

Two participants detailed their involvement with police forces in Saskatchewan. The first participant talked about how she had not wanted to involve police after a domestic assault but that her sister-in-law had called on her behalf. Alternatively, the second participant expressed her frustration about the fact that she had to constantly call police so that her abusive ex-partner would be charged and taken away.

His sister – his sister was there. And I didn’t want her to call the cops but she called the cops. And he ended up picked up and had, you know, assault charges on him already and so I ended up pressing assault charges. (Participant D)

So I didn’t want to anger him any further in trying to get away like...like he was just always there like it and it had to end in...charges. (Participant B)

**Jail**

Three participants discussed incarceration. Two participants talked about how their partner was either remanded or sentenced to jail time after a domestic assault had occurred.

And then...he went to jail for four months and I ended up dropping the [assault] charges on him. (Participant D)

So he was 18 and he was already in and out of Dojack, he’s already like by the time he was 18 he already like near killed a few people by then. (Participant C)

Like he went right from Dojack to jail. He’s now in the penitentiary...so he’s never, ever, I don’t think ever he’s ever been out of...incarceration for more than two months maybe ever in his life. (Participant C)
Basic Theme 6: Impact/Effects of DV on Participants’ Children

The presence of domestic violence within the family home has been determined as a disruptive and harmful factor for the children involved. Assaults during pregnancy and abuser violence towards children were two emerging issues discussed in relation to this basic theme. Participants provided insight into their struggle in trying to protect themselves and their children while attempting to flee violence.

*DV during Pregnancy*

Participants identified that they felt a sense of jealousy from their partner when they announced that they were pregnant. At this point, an escalation of violence was noted and the abusers were more controlling and jealous. Participants worked to find a safe place. They advised that they did this because they wanted to prevent physical assault so that they could avoid complications and give birth to a healthy baby.

And then...I got pregnant at 17 and then I had my daughter and her dad was violent. And then when I found out I was pregnant...I had to start being careful around him. (Participant B)

And so...during pregnancy like he was start to push – push it. So for safety I just went back to the reserve and stayed with my dad. (Participant B)

But at the same like maybe about a month after I even found out I was pregnant the – like my baby’s dad had started...like being abusive towards me and yeah. (Participant C)

Same thing happened when I got pregnant, he became abusive and controlling. (Participant C)

*DV Abuser Violence towards Participant’s Child*

One participant advised of a situation where her partner, who was the biological father of her child, began to act physically violent towards his child. Previous to this, the abusive partner had only been violent toward the participant.
So by the time she was 9 months old and he was starting to get violent but not only with my daughter. He made one move on my daughter and I split. I just – like my daughter was...table walking on the coffee table and so he – she was getting in the way of him laying on the couch watching TV. So he just kicked her, like in the butt, you know, in her Pamper. (Participant B)

**Basic Theme 7: Normalization of Domestic Violence**

The normalization of domestic violence is often what keeps individuals in their violent relationships for such a long period of time. Participant normalization of domestic violence as well as abuser normalization of domestic violence are the two issues discussed which comprise the seventh basic theme.

*Normalization*

The participants in this research advised that there was a point that they reached where they felt as though the violence in their life was normal. For some participants, violence was an accepted and common practice in their childhood home and so they grew up believing that the aforementioned behaviours were a conventional part of intimate relationships.

At some point, at some time, you look back on it and it was just like normal. It was a life – a life you have to put up with – it was normal. Because I – now I go to different programs, I go to drop in center once a week and they talk about power and control and all these other different things about violence and about stuff like that. And there’s this one table about power and control, it was like holy, like – I like – everything they talk about was normal for me to live. Like it was normal like didn’t knew it was like power and the control. Like how people can – and I couldn’t believe it, like holy. Like you know, it’s kind of overwhelming for me because I was living like that. (Participant A)

So I thought that was normal for a long time. But because my dad and my friends were telling me it wasn’t. (Participant B)

So domestic violence is...you know, was seen as normal to me in my lifetime. It’s just impossible to be around and it was so common with my family and friends and everybody that there was just felt like there was no way out of that. (Participant C)
You learn what you see and you learn what the way your life was and what’s okay. So if – if...so if – if it’s hard – just like again getting back to domestic violence – if you’ve seen your mother beaten then you’re going to see that that is not completely wrong. And you don’t see what should have happened and what kind of relationships are...healthy. You don’t learn healthy relationships if you’ve never seen it. And so a lot of kind of issues just keep on building and...unfortunately it creates like I said, dysfunction. (Participant E)

*DV Abuser Normalizing Domestic Violence*

Alternatively, one participant observed that her partner also felt as though violence was normal. The reason for this was because her abusive partner had grown up watching his father be abusive towards his mother. As a result, he repeated the same patterns as an adult in his intimate partner relationships.

So this was like by the time I got pregnant all this...you know, domestic violence in my mom or my aunties or his family or you know, it was so normal, so common. (Participant C)

**Basic Theme 8: Barriers to Leaving an Abusive Relationship**

Throughout this research, participants identified various reasons and roadblocks they encountered in their attempts to flee violence. Participants provided commentary on their past relationships and their efforts towards living a life free from abuse. As such, this basic theme came together as a result of two primary topics: reasons for staying in an abusive relationship and lack of supports.

*Reasons for Staying in an Abusive Domestic Relationship*

Participants conveyed many reasons for why they chose to remain in an abusive relationship. One participant indicated that her relationship was an escape from her overbearing parents while another advised that violence had become so normal to her that she felt complacent and unable to effect change.

I think because I was trying to get away from my parents. Like, I was the – you know just let me breathe. (Participant B)
And then but by then I was feeling already like stuck in that lifestyle and now this is happening. (Participant C)

Lack of Supports

A lack of financial, personal, and community supports were identified as significant barriers in the process of leaving a violent relationship. As a result, the participants were unable to flee abuse or if they were successful in leaving they often had to return shortly after due to a lack of money or a weakened resolve. Further to this, one participant expressed frustration at the lack of resources available to her while she was residing on her home reserve.

Just getting out of...the reserve and having basically – because there was no like – nothing out there – no supports for me or my partner. (Participant D)

So – so I didn’t sort of have that support. So, so no, I got sucked back into that. (Participant C)

Like I ended up divorcing and I think like a big part of it was how much that time and all that stuff came up what it did and I think like it drew a bigger wedge between me and my husband and brought up all these memories of rape and then no one helped me. I remember even the couple times I phoned that help line – I even made a report about because no one phoned me back and I just thought, oh my god. (Participant E)

Basic Theme 9: Standing up to DV Partner

The final basic theme, “Standing up to DV Partner,” is a significant departure from the previous eight themes in that it focuses on situations where the participant was in control. Participants discussed their experiences in protecting their children from domestic violence and fighting back against their partner. Each of these is discussed in further detail below.
Protecting Children from DV

One participant talked about the importance of shielding her daughter from the violence occurring in the home. At the time, she was normalizing the abuse that her partner was inflicting on her but she insisted that her daughter not be a part of it.

And I was smart because I left my girl on the reserve during those times kind of thing. (Participant B)

Pretty much I was already pulling myself away from my daughter. Like I was more like I have to leave her behind because this guy is not gonna, you know. (Participant B)

Fighting Back Against DV Partner

Finally, participants advised of situations where they responded to their partner’s abusive behaviours with violence. Both participants talked about how they had put up with repeated abuse for years and that they had finally had enough.

That’s when I stood up and fought back with him. I fought back with him. At one point he said, you’re just like a man, because I was fighting back. (Participant A)

So I put my baby in the room and I told him that’s it, you know, you can do this to me but you can’t do that to her. I said because I will fight you now, you know. (Participant B)

Summary of Organizing Theme 4

The fourth organizing theme, “Domestic Violence,” presents a detailed outline of the power and control dynamics at play in a violent relationship, the various types of domestic violence, the normalization of violence, and fleeing abuse. Power and control were identified as the fundamental sources for the occurrence of emotional, physical, and verbal abuses. A commonality amongst the three aforementioned forms of abuse was that they are all carried out in an effort to exercise control and gain dominance over the victim. Another similarity amongst these issues discussed was the fact that abusers
would go to extensive lengths to ensure that their partner felt as though they were stuck and without options. Participants indicated that they eventually reached a point where they lost their will to fight and often became compliant with the demands of their abusive partner. The different forms of domestic violence can occur simultaneously or in isolation of one another. Additionally, the frequency and severity of abuse varied from one situation to the next and was dependent on a number of variables.

Verbal abuse was identified as a commonly occurring type of domestic violence in this research. Abusive words and arguments were identified as one of the first occurring forms of domestic violence within the relationship. Participants spoke about the escalation of the aforementioned types of verbal abuse and advised that the violence intensified, ultimately resulting in physical and sexual assaults. In some situations, abuse in intimate partner relationships led to involvement in the criminal justice system. Abusers often used assault as a way to gain physical control over their victim. Additionally, these behaviours instilled fear in the victim and forced them to comply with the abuser’s demands in order to avoid further abuse. However, all five participants reported that they had experienced some form of physical violence at the hands of their domestic partner. Physical violence led to assault charges under the Criminal Code of Canada, involvement with the courts, and the resulting sentence in four of the five aforementioned situations.

The presence of domestic violence in the family home has obvious impacts on the victim and abuser. However, the presence of intimate partner abuse also has significant impacts on children residing in the home. The experience of witnessing domestic violence leads to the assumption that abuse is a normal and acceptable practice to deal
with conflict. If children are continually exposed to violence they will internalize these behaviours and subsequently repeat them as adults. Similarly, participants discussed a tendency to normalize the violence within their relationship. In some instances, participants had witnessed dysfunction and violence throughout their childhood and so they viewed this behaviour as normal. Alternatively, some participants minimized the severity of the violence or compared their situation to the circumstances of others.

Those participants who did recognize the magnitude of their situation and had made a decision to leave their abusive relationship provided commentary on the various barriers to leaving. These participants were cognizant of the dysfunction in their relationship but were unable to change their circumstances due to a lack of financial means, community pressures, and intimidation from the abuser. Some participants indicated that they were able to flee the violence while others advised that they remained in their relationship longer than they should have. Occasionally, the decision to remain in the relationship often led to the participant acting violently towards her abuser in an attempt to defend herself and protect the children. Participants advised that they had a threshold for the tolerance of violence in their relationship. Once this threshold had been surpassed they became angry and began to fight back against their domestic partner in situations where he was being physically aggressive. In a way, they were standing up for themselves and their children, effectively taking their power back from their abuser.

**Organizing Theme 5: Determination**

Table 5 provides a detailed outline of the issues discussed and the according basic and organizing themes.
Table 6: Organizing Theme 5: Determination

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<th>Issues Discussed</th>
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<td><strong>Sober</strong></td>
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**Basic Theme 1: Survival**

The first basic theme, “Survival,” describes participants’ reflections on their ability to persevere through difficult life situations. Participants discussed their struggles and highlighted the personal qualities which enabled them to carry on. Two issues discussed comprise this basic theme: endure and strength.

**Endure**

One participant provided insight into her daily struggles as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. This participant also indicated she had had suicidal thoughts and often questioned her purpose in this world.

I survived. And I don’t how I survived it but I survived. For what reason, I’m trying to find a reason why that I’m surviving this. And what is my reason for god to put me here. What is my – what am I supposed to do, what is it that was, you know, that I’m meant to do here and still surviving. And – and I’m trying to figure that out now and trying to better my life as we speak. (Participant A)
Strength

Participants identified strength as an integral characteristic that enabled them to get through tough situations and overcome barriers in their life. One participant discussed strength within the context of her daily struggles while the other described a situation where she gained strength and power upon leaving an abusive relationship.

It was like, it wasn’t easy, but every day I get on my knees and I – I pray and I just ask for strength and try to do anything I can to get better. (Participant A)

Because now when I look at him today when we see each other – because we do have to see each other, he knows, right. So it’s kind of like I have that power now, like you can’t do that to me, you know. (Participant B)

Basic Theme 2: Fleeing Abuse

The second basic theme pertains to the participants’ experiences in leaving an abusive relationship and breaking the cycle of violence. Participants identified that a major factor in their decision to leave their abusive relationship was the recognition that the cycle of violence had a cascading impact. This basic theme came together as a result of the aforementioned components and additional discussion on escaping domestic violence, running away, and support services available to women fleeing domestic violence.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

Three participants had witnessed domestic violence in their childhood home and were fearful that their children would grow up in the same atmosphere and later repeat the same patterns as adults. As a result, they felt compelled to break the cycle of violence so that their children would not grow up under the belief that violence is acceptable and tolerated conduct.
You know, I don’t want to put my kids through that, I said I don’t want to put my kids through that through that life anymore. I want better for them – my kids come first to me and, like you know, I want better things for my kids. I don’t want them to suffer because of what I suffered. That has to stop. (Participant A)

Yeah and we struggle with that. Because she’s trying to make a cycle and I just keep breaking it down, so. (Participant B)

I just didn’t bother with them anymore and like I still remember obviously from my whole life that I didn’t want to be stuck in that...ugly, ugly cycle or you know, or I didn’t want you know – because that’s the last thing I want is for, you know, for my kids to be so numb to that sort of violence that they’re going to be the same people and considering who their dads are like you know, I would, you know, never want anything like that for my kids. (Participant C)

I’m single today because, you know, because of how much I don’t want to be in that cycle or – or see my kids go through it or, you know, I want to be well enough to help...others. (Participant C)

*Leaving an Abusive Relationship*

All of the participants had left their abusive relationship at the time of the interviews. However, only four out of the five participants discussed their experience in fleeing abuse. Participants indicated that there was a point that they reached when they decided they could no longer tolerate abuse. Some participants identified that they left the relationship for their children while others indicated that they successfully left their relationship with the assistance of victim services programs.

That’s when I decided – like, every time I said I’m going to leave him, I’m going to go home, I’m going to leave you here. He used to tell me, I don’t care, go home, leave. Until one day I really decided this is enough. I can’t live like this, I can’t, I’m tired. So about – over about 18 years ago [that I left my abusive partner]. And – and I told him what I was going to do and what is my plan. I said I’m tired of this I said I’m really tired and he didn’t take me serious. And to the point where I had to leave everything, my job – everything that I had to leave. I had to take my kids away from where they were like in school and had friends. I said – he didn’t believe me that I was going to do that and I said – he – I told him, I don’t want to see you anymore. That’s it, I said – that’s it. (Participant A)

And from there...my daughter, when she was born, I promised her like I wouldn’t stay. (Participant B)
That was the one that got me out of my last relationship [Regina Police Service Victim Services]. She put her neck out and she was the only Indian that would do that. So it was that team that actually got me completely out of the relationship. (Participant B)

Luckily, because he was such...a loser he ended up getting picked up and that was again...how I broke out of a bad relationship. (Participant C)

Yeah, and after I left him I just basically left him and didn’t go back. (Participant D)

Escape

Two participants described leaving their abusive relationship as an urgent and somewhat covert event. One participant advised that she was forced to leave her home after an argument with her partner and that she had to have her mom drive over two hours to come get her. Another participant recounted that she fled her abusive relationship in the middle of the night when her partner was sleeping.

And...it just so happens my mom called, she always had that feeling because she – she knew he was going to start doing that stuff again with the baby. And, so I – I kicked the phone so it would go off the thing and – and I just knew it was my mom and so I just yelled at her to come to Saskatoon to come get us. You know, she was on the reserve. (Participant B)

I ended up having to leave that by...like I just snuck out of the house in the middle of the night and with like my two year old I guess. (Participant C)

Runaway

One participant reflected on her experience of living with her family on Piapot First Nation throughout her childhood. She described feeling suffocated by her overprotective parents and a need to get away from the situation.

So I just hiked back to the city, you know, lied to the cops, [because] they would pick you up halfway and they’re like, where you from, you know, Raymore. Just way out, oh what are you doing, oh my blah blah blah, you know. So I’d just manage to get rides in or...other people going from the reserve would pick us up, so. But the majority of the time it was a long, long walk – like it was all night just to get to Regina. (Participant B)
Shelter

In describing her journey in fleeing abuse, one participant indicated that she sought assistance from a crisis shelter and later, a second stage shelter in Regina, Saskatchewan. She explained that she didn’t have anywhere to stay after she had left her relationship and so she decided to connect with the safe shelters in the city.

I had to move to the city figure something else out to do and then I got into a like a shelter – like I had nowhere to go out here so I went to stay in a shelter and after I stayed at shelter I got informed with this place and this is SOFIA house. (Participant D)

Basic Theme 3: Coping

Traumatic incidents were one of the most frequently discussed issues in the interviews. Consequently, participants provided insight on their ability to manage these situations and the according emotions. Three of the five participants stated that their family or they had personally used substances to cope with the negative feelings that they were experiencing. Participants also considered the role of support systems and agencies in this process.

Coping with Substances

The use of alcohol and drugs to cope with trauma was frequently mentioned throughout the interviews. Some participants indicated they self-medicating so that they could avoid experiencing the negative emotions associated with trauma. Others turned to substances so they could escape the negative reality of their circumstances. Coping with substances was something that both participants and their family members took part in.

I felt like he gave up and my mom tried but she gave up and joined my dad later on without dealing with it, their problems and without trying to fix that problem they just turned to drinking and that’s where they just stuck. But somehow my dad found out what happened and without trying to fix the problem he just, he
didn’t. I felt like he didn’t know how to handle the problems and, or he didn’t know how to handle it so he turned to drinking. (Participant A)

I was trying to run or escape from something and that’s when I realized I wasn’t having fun. I was hurting myself more and more with drinking [because] I had drinking problems here. (Participant A)

Because how bad he treated me, alcohol made me feel better but...but I was abusing my body with substance, with different people, you know, just not caring. I think it was just a comfort, just an escape. Like I just self-medicated for a long time with pills. (Participant B)

Like, and he would say like...he would drink to forget and like...but it was just really unhappy. And...like I remember my dad saying...I can’t deal with it, and like it was like he was having such a hard time with being in school and trying to force it. And it was because – like it – like I said he died of cirrhosis and so he had been drinking hard at the end and...it was because he wasn’t happy with himself. He believed a lot of things that were told to him and – and he just he couldn’t cope with it and...it’s sick. (Participant E)

**Difficulty Dealing with Things**

Two participants discussed their negative experience in the IRSS and the traumas they experienced. Both participants indicated they were having issues processing what had happened to them and dealing with the emotions surrounding the incident.

And from there on I don’t know, I don’t know back then they didn’t have very much to...with socialize, like with life, how to deal with stuff. (Participant A)

Oh you’re in the residence, oh yeah you never went home. And people – some people never forget that as adults and like and then like I said, you carry stuff. (Participant E)

**Supports**

Participants discussed the individuals and community agencies that supported them in their recoveries from substance abuse and domestic violence. The importance of the aforementioned assistance was emphasized by the participants.

They try to help you out, the worker are there, like you know, and we do programs, that you know, they try to help you to – to cope with it in a healthy way
instead of making it a negative way. They try to break you away from that. (Participant A)

I guess I support the fact that people with domestic violence issues need supports. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 4: Overcoming Addictions**

Addiction and substance abuse were widely discussed topics amongst the participants. Participants provided insight into how addiction impacted their personal life, family, and health. Each participant talked about a personal or familial connection in the journey to becoming sober and overcoming addiction. Additionally, participants described the reasons for why they decided to work on their addictions. Drug and alcohol treatment was one support identified by participants and was subsequently discussed at length. Two issues discussed comprise this basic theme: drug and alcohol treatment and sober.

*Drug and Alcohol Treatment*

One participant explained her involvement with different types of addiction treatment and provided her observations on how this experience assisted in her recovery. Another participant discussed her father’s involvement with the Alcoholics Anonymous program in the community and surrounding area.

At age 22, I decided to go for treatment, drug and alcohol treatment. I was aware of lots of things because I seen I – I after I sober up I keep continue on. I keep continue on to trying to – trying to – really trying to break out away from it. (Participant A)

My dad was the first addiction worker on the reserve, yeah, he had his own program. And...that’s how it started on our reserve. Like I know, AA was there before but on the reserves he was one of the first people. (Participant B)
Sober

Sobriety was a topic mentioned by three participants. Participants stated that their motivation to work on overcoming their addiction stemmed from a need to restore their sense of identity, work on their health, or because they had become pregnant.

I was doing lots for myself, I really wanted to break away from where I was and why I felt like I wasn’t normal and you know, I just like, like after a while I done drug and alcohol treatment. (Participant A)

So...I just have 6 years like drug free. Because it was like do or die, I’m going to die one day. Because I started doing drugs just to medicate my body because my body was sore, my mind – I didn’t want to think anymore. Yeah, I would have. So it took a long time to just to quit. I actually had no choice but to quit. (Participant B)

I guess we just kind of partied together for a summer and I sobered up at the end of the summer and realized I was pregnant, so it wasn’t. (Participant C)

Summary of Organizing Theme 5

The fifth organizing theme, “Determination,” is a shift from previous organizing themes in that it focuses on growth, progress, and improvement. Participants provided commentary on four basic themes: survival, fleeing abuse, coping, and overcoming addiction. In speaking about previous abusive relationships participants described their approach to making it through daily life as basic survival. In these situations, participants were aware of the dysfunction and violence in their relationship but were not at a place in life where they were able to initiate change. Eventually, participants reached out for supports from friends, family, and the larger community and were able to get to a position where they were strong enough to leave their abusive relationship in the past. In leaving their relationships participants gained strength, independence, and a renewed sense of self-esteem. Some participants articulated that they left their abusive partner so that their children would not have to grow up in an environment where violence was
normalized and tolerated. Additionally, they stated that they wanted to end the cycle of violence so as to prevent their children from exhibiting violent thoughts and behaviours.

The same courage demonstrated in leaving an abusive relationship was also employed in overcoming drug and alcohol addiction. Health issues, pregnancy, and a lost sense of identity all served as catalysts in the lives of participants and pushed them to seek help for their addictions. The use of substances was discussed by every participant in this research. Participants discussed witnessing their family abuse alcohol and drugs and how they repeated the same pattern as adults. Additionally, participants indicated that drugs and alcohol were often used as coping mechanisms in dealing with past traumas. Alternatively, participants provided insight into other sources of support that assisted them in overcoming issues and moving forward.

**Organizing Theme 6: Hope**

Table 7 presents an outline of the issues discussed and basic themes in relation to the organizing theme of “Hope.” The information is summarized starting with the issues discussed followed by the basic themes and then the overarching organizing theme.

Change, aspirations, positivity, and healing comprise the larger organizing theme.

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<th>Issues Discussed</th>
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<td>Participant Recommendations for this Research</td>
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**Basic Theme 1: Change**

The first basic theme, “Change,” outlines the participants’ experiences in identifying the negative aspects of their lives and subsequently working towards making a positive transformation. Participants discussed education, dreams, aspirations, and advocacy when providing insight on this topic. Additionally, participants reflected on their recognition of the cycle of violence in their domestic relationships and the steps taken towards addressing the aforementioned issue.

**Wake Up Call**

One participant indicated that there was a primary reason or “wake up call” for why she made the decision to turn her life around. This participant advised that her daughter was beginning to mimic her behaviours and she decided to make some life changes so as to curb her daughter from repeating her harmful patterns.

And that’s when I neglect my kids and that’s why – my last one had to wake me, my last baby, had to really had to wake me up. She started skipping school and she started getting into trouble at an early age and you know. And she really had to make me see and to really look at myself and stop running. (Participant A)
**Realization**

One participant reflected on her life experiences and her tendency to downplay the seriousness of her negative behaviours, choices, and circumstances. She described her experience in recognizing the detrimental impact of her decisions on her life and the resulting initiative for change.

So like thank goodness I changed some of those things but it was like it was like only then was I realizing...like in my own mind that I need to stop doing that. (Participant E)

**Recognition that DV is Wrong**

Although all of the participants had experienced domestic violence at some point in their life there was a general recognition amongst the participants that they were being mistreated. Two participants talked about the violence they experienced in their relationship and provided insight into the moments when they realized that domestic violence was wrong.

And I was like – looked around I’m like, no this isn’t normal, no that is not right, no this is like it opened my eyes. (Participant C)

And like we had talked about like well you don’t like your mom going through this, I don’t like my mom going through this, like so we’re not going to be that. (Participant C)

Yes [my perspective on domestic violence would be different]. Just because like if I would have grown up with my biological family I wouldn’t be where I am right now. I would be like so – I’d be in so many different places I think or maybe I wouldn’t even be alive. (Participant D)

**Recognizing the Cycle of Violence**

One participant was able to identify the cycle of intergenerational violence amongst fellow students in the IRSS. This participant also advised that these individuals went on to repeat this learned cycle in their domestic relationships.
Looking back, you know, I know some of the students who – like one girl in particular she had...you know, always been in that, like an ugly, ugly cycle, you know from being in there and to like she just – she actually just passed away like lived a hard life right up until you know, like two weeks ago or whenever her funeral was and she was you know, and I knew that like right from grade three or four when she had first come to the school that she was you know, it was, that it like, you know it was almost predictable had I seen that you now, as an adult now or from what I know now like that she would be stuck in that sort of cycle, so yeah. (Participant C)

**DV Abuser Addressing Domestic Violence Issues**

Alternatively, one participant discussed her domestic partner and his identification of abusive patterns. She talked about the legal implications of his abusive behaviours, programming, and her hopes to reconcile the relationship. This individual was the only one of five participants attempting to reunite with her partner after a domestic assault had taken place.

And he swore he would never hit me again and he would change his ways and – and yeah it’s like a year and a half later and he hasn’t laid a hand on me. (Participant D)

No, no we – we haven’t but that was something we – we were working on and he’s continuing to work on it now that he is in jail so hopefully he thinks about that. (Participant D)

We’ve come a long way, right and we’re just only going to get farther and...if he can work – work through his problems with his addictions and with...his residential school experience then, you know, he’s a really good person. Once he puts his mind to it he’s really good, he’s really smart, a good father. (Participant D)

**Refocus**

A shift from a negative mindset to a positive one was described by a participant. She talked about her past and how she had made some bad choices which had ultimately led to a harmful lifestyle. This participant indicated that past life lessons enabled her to make healthier life choices and to change her life for the better.
Refocus my – my life and you know, sort of, you know, things learning from the past basically and being able to...I guess deal with it in a healthier way. So no, like yeah. (Participant C)

_Education_

The importance of education was strongly emphasized by one participant. She noted that education was important to her family and indicated that she had returned to school in order to set a positive example for her young daughter.

And then my dad told me to get back to the city and go finish my high school and he said, that’s all I want from you before I die, right. And I’m like well you’re not going to die. But he was really sick but then sure enough I graduated...I got back into school at Balfour. (Participant B)

I mean that’s why I really think education, doesn’t matter what your level of learning is, it’s really important to go. So in order to want my daughter to go to school, you know, I had to come out of this shell. So I – I was just, you know, impressed with my daughter, because in order to set the bar high for your children well you have to you know, pass it. So I went to school for 2 years and I tell her [inaudible], you know, you’ve got to go. (Participant B)

_Advocate_

Through hard work and determination, one participant was able to overcome the obstacles in her life and become an advocate for others. This participant advised that she was passionate about helping other people and was proud that she was finally in a position to be able to effect change.

And I did participate in...the resolution things that occurred across the country...and so I guess the big thing is I support it and...I’ve always been an advocate in different ways...for in – literacy field and again in the inner city and – and so forth. (Participant E)

_Future_

In discussing the cycle of violence, participants noted that they did not want the cycle of violence or abusive behaviours to impact subsequent generations of their family.
This was a primary motivator for participants to change their negative lifestyles and model healthy choices for their children and grandchildren.

And I don’t want my kids to be like that. I was looking back so much on my – my – my past life and from doing that I was trying to make a change with my kids and my, like you know, try to make it that they can be them. (Participant A)

**Participant Recommendations for this Research**

One participant was very supportive of this research project and suggested a number of agencies where the researcher could send the final document. This participant emphasized the importance of this topic and the need for the voices of First Nations women to be heard. Additionally, she discussed the implications that this research could have on service providers and programming for domestic violence.

I think that like it’s hard because I really I wish that like...that somehow your research...goes into some good places where actual funders of things where you know – a parenting programs and like the government and realizing how much is needed as a consequence like I think like I would recommend you sending...part of your research like to the Resolutions Committee with the...Indian Residential School Secretariat. And I know like because...sometimes some stories that come and sometimes some research that comes out of things can have even greater impact but if it’s you’ve if it’s like you get that right one link. (Participant E)

And...I support what you’re doing for research. Make sure that you find ways to send your copies of your research to places that you might not necessarily be thinking of right now but where...where people can see and understand things. (Participant E)

People that have to try find funding for domestic violence like link with those other places too because...you just, like I said, one link that could be the right link and is so important with the subject that you’re working with. (Participant E)

**Basic Theme 2: Aspirations**

The second basic theme came together as a result of participants’ conversations regarding their future plans, wishes, and hopes. Participants shared their thoughts around their specific goals, dreams, and opportunities and emphasized the importance of
education in fulfilling these aspirations. A common thread in this basic theme was that participants worked hard so that their children could have a better life than they had.

Dreams

One participant discussed a situation where she was unable to realize her own dreams. As such, this participant set out to satisfy the aforementioned dreams so as to ensure a better future for her children. She indicated that her children were the motivation and inspiration that she needed to work towards this wish.

All the dreams I wanted for myself; all the healthy dreams I wanted. It’s not too late for my son. (Participant A)

Goals

A healthier lifestyle was a primary goal of one participant. Again, this participant recognized the negative patterns in her lifestyle and began to work on these harmful habits. Her main objective was to rectify past errors and to set a healthy example for her children to follow.

Yeah, in a healthy way. And yeah, they’re really smart and that’s why I said they’re really smart. And I don’t want to – I don’t want to destroy that. I want them to have better than what I had. That’s my goal. (Participant A)

I kind of say that to them. I just like, you know, other than that, I’m trying to – I’m still working at what I want – my goals. (Participant A)

Opportunities

Education was identified by one participant as an opportunity. This participant had completed high school but did not have the means to continue on to post-secondary education. As such, this participant pushed her daughter to attend university because she wanted her to succeed in an area where she hadn’t and to take advantage of the opportunity to build a better future for herself.
Because she’d be like, you just have your grade 12 in training and blah, blah, blah and you know, and that’s why I keep telling her, I was like you’re in university right now, do you want it? But...like she’s just like feeling discouraged, right and I said there’s so much opportunity you have. (Participant B)

**Basic Theme 3: Positivity**

“Positivity,” the third basic theme, represents the optimistic emotions, activities, and goals as outlined by the participants. Love, self-confidence, overcoming adversity, and living a violence free lifestyle were the four issues discussed to comprise the overarching basic theme. Participants provided their observations on healthy familial relationships and the according sense of companionship and protection. A discussion of the journey to living a life free from violence and overcoming the associated barriers was detailed by the participants.

**Love**

Despite experiencing a number of negative emotions and traumas throughout their life, two participants emphasized a warm sense of love and affection in their childhood home. One participant advised that there was a lack of the aforementioned emotions in her life and that she had always imagined an alternative childhood where those characteristics were present.

A good home I always wanted of love, and a normal kind of life, you know, a healthy kind of life. (Participant A)

I can’t say that we grew up not having...love because like my mom always tried her best despite, you know, who was, you know, like who was there sort of trying to weigh her down or bring her down. (Participant C)

It wasn’t really a lack of love. I mean people – it’s a different kind of love. (Participant C)

I loved my childhood home. I have a lot of memories, a lot of good memories. (Participant D)
**Self-Confidence**

One participant described her self-confidence as a diverse and changing attribute. This participant was only able to experience self-confidence when she was drinking; this was a contributing factor to her alcohol addiction.

And from there on, I just started drinking. And I guess – I don’t know, I just felt self-confidence. (Participant A)

Alternatively, this participant experienced a true sense of self-confidence when she eventually gained the strength to leave her abusive relationship. She indicated that in leaving her relationship she gained a strong sense of independence and power.

The six year abuse that I had to go through and I didn’t felt no more after I gone through six year abuse in my life. So that drinking felt like it gave me some self confidence, it just felt better to me. (Participant A)

**Overcoming Adversity**

Addiction, family issues, anxiety, and self-doubt were just a few of the barriers identified by participants. Each of the participants had demonstrated a strong sense of perseverance and credited this characteristic for enabling them to continue working towards their goals.

So now I know I have a positive side to me, somehow how I know there is a positive side to me. I’m really trying hard, my best, and every time I try to praise myself [inaudible] telling myself I am doing a beautiful job. I try to keep myself positive and self-talk myself positive so you know, I can tell myself you know, telling my kids that they’re doing and how wonderful they are and that I’m proud. (Participant A)

So like I’m just proud of her...because she knew my drug problem, she knows we struggled and she – and then she knew my reading you know. (Participant B)

So but – but you know, from last week till now a lot has changed and I, you know, really feeling...positive I guess about being able to share and let steam off, you know, and...just you know sort of had a chance to think about things. (Participant C)
Like you know so and now like I see like how my kids are so good and lovable with their kids and things and I think, oh yes, and...so that worked like in that way. They really are affectionate with their children and they do support schooling and all the different things and...I managed to get past a lot of stuff for them that I see with them doing with their kids. (Participant E)

I feel that people need to speak out and say things that...have happened to have healing happen and – and I think that’s what I want as a person too. (Participant E)

*Living a Violence Free Lifestyle*

Four of the five participants had left their violent relationship. The fifth participant was in the processing of reconciling with her abusive partner. One participant provided insight into the reasons for why she made the decision to leave her partner and her subsequent resolve to live a violence free lifestyle.

I want to break that cycle of violence whatever that we suffer; I try to break it for my kids today. I don’t want them to be in my shoes. (Participant A)

And I finally said you know what, you need to do your own healing. You can’t come near my healing, I can’t help you. (Participant B)

I wouldn’t sit around to actually give any man the chance to...like hurt me again so. (Participant C)

**Basic Theme 4: Healing**

The final basic theme focuses on the participants’ healing journeys. “Healing,” came together as a basic theme based on six issues discussed: bettering one’s self, programming, Aboriginal ceremonies, trust, forgiveness, and journey. Participants outlined their reasons for reaching out for help and talked about their motivations in doing so. Specific support agencies, programs, and traditional ceremonies are discussed in detail and are credited for assisting the participants in leading a positive lifestyle.
Better Myself

A motivation to make life changes was expressed by the participants. A willingness to learn and to take part in drug and alcohol treatment, parenting classes, and programming for domestic violence were identified by the participants as necessary components in bettering themselves. Participants stressed the importance of changing their circumstances so as to create a brighter future for their children and grandchildren than they had themselves.

And you know, I’m here to better myself. I really get something done for myself. (Participant A)

That’s when I decided to get help, to find help for myself, for my kids. (Participant A)

So that’s what I’ve been doing and that’s why I am here, to help myself, and so I can teach myself more. One day, one day, even though I may be older I still want to help my people. (Participant A)

Yeah so that’s why I, you know, I wanted to hopefully, you know, help you with your thing at the same time as helping myself. (Participant C)

Programming

One participant advised that at the time of the interview she was a part of Ranch Ehrlo’s Intensive Family Preservation Program. She provided extensive detail on how the program has helped her manage the previous traumas in her life and enabled her to become a better parent to her children.

And so I really fought here, fought for this program to get here so I can better my life and so I don’t have to repeat the same thing, like on to my kids or my grandkids. (Participant A)

I came down here about 4 months ago to do this program. I’m still in this program and I’m still, like you know, working at it. (Participant A)
I said, I wish I could have found this type of treatment [Ranch Ehrlo] 20 years back ago. I wish I was still young when I found this kind of help and that’s when she said it’s never too late to learn, it’s not too late yet, she said. (Participant A)

Another participant emphasized the benefits of the Teen Parent Program at the Shirley Schneider Support Center in Balfour Collegiate.

Well, with the first relationship I went to I think it was through Balfour, *When Love Hurts*. (Participant B)

Yeah, yeah. That’s why I was shocked that program, you know that same, yeah. So I went through that and I remembered all the safety stuff in there [*When Love Hurts*]. So I still know all the safety stuff and I still carry it. And so I took those tools into this relationship. (Participant B)

*Aboriginal Ceremonies*

Two participants spoke about the role of traditional ceremonies in their healing journey. Participant B discussed sweat lodges and the concept of respect. She indicated that the aforementioned cultural aspects helped her to rebuild relations with her estranged brother. Participant A attended ceremonies to alleviate stress and anxiety as well as to assist her in working through past traumas.

So, anyways...we were building our sweat lodge because that’s what – we have ceremonies in the summer and he [my brother] came over. (Participant B)

So he was telling me be nice, you know, we’re around these tools, and you know, it’s like church basically. You know, have respect. (Participant B)

I had actually went to a ceremony the night before just to sort of clear my...clear my head and so I’d be a little bit prepared to talk about some of the things. (Participant C)

*Trust*

A general mistrust of authority figures and an inability to let people into her life was explained by one participant. This participant provided insight into her intimate relationship and how she was finally able to build trust with her partner.
But like...he...I think he – he would’ve had he not realized how messed up my whole world had been because of the way my life went and I shared a lot with him to tell him a lot of things and it went to show like how much I loved him because I felt safe to do that and plus it was like answering to why I would be the way I would be.  (Participant E)

Forgiveness

Familial strain was identified as a source of stress and anxiety by one participant. As such, she decided to forgive her estranged brother for his past actions in an effort to move on. This participant indicated that her past was interfering with her present and future.

Yeah, I just dread our talks, you know what I mean. [Because] with my brother I just cave in, that’s what I mean. Like I don’t let him get to where he needs to go, I’m just like that’s ok, you know, I’m going to hug him, and I’m like. So I keep telling my partner, I – I can’t do that because I make it easy for him, it’s like I forgive him, and it’s just like, no, you know. So I’m like trying to keep like the distance.  (Participant B)

Journey

One participant referred to her life as a journey. She commented that there had been good and bad times but that she had demonstrated perseverance throughout. Finally, she indicated that her metaphorical travels were not yet finished and that she would continue to work towards her goals.

It’s been a really rough journey [laughter] [mixed voices] but I’m still walking – I’m still on the journey.  (Participant A)

Summary of Organizing Theme 6

“Hope,” the final organizing theme constitutes positive change and the participants’ dreams and goals going forward. The previously discussed traumas and dysfunctions served as catalysts which pushed the participants to work towards change and healthy life choices. Participants noted that this impetus for change was spurred by a
wake-up call which forced them to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of their life. Participants reflected on the environment in their childhood home and the emotional capacities of their caregivers. One participant identified that although her mother often struggled with addiction and domestic violence she still ensured that her children felt loved. Alternatively, one participant advised that the aforementioned feelings were absent in her childhood home and that she often imagined a situation where her family members were more affectionate. Participants discussed future aspirations for themselves and their families. A common sentiment throughout this conversation was that participants wanted a better life for their children than they had for themselves.

Self-confidence and perseverance were identified as two characteristics critical in overcoming the adversities associated with addiction, domestic violence, abuse, and intergenerational trauma. Throughout all of this, participants maintained that their positive outlook on life was what ultimately enabled them to succeed. Participants sought out schooling, community programs, and resources to educate themselves on the impact of violence on themselves and their children. Additionally, education assisted participants in securing employment, boosting self-esteem, and gaining a sense of independence from their abusive partner. Trust and forgiveness were identified as crucial components on the path to recovery and living a life free of negativity. All of the participants had lived through horrendous traumas and despite this fact, they all worked hard to create a more positive future for themselves. As such, resiliency became a common thread throughout this organizing theme. As discussed, each participant worked extensively to overcome issues and adversities to live a life free from dysfunction.
However, participants noted that their healing process was a journey and that they still had much work to do in order to meet their goals.

**Global Theme: Intergenerational Trauma and Violence**

The global theme, “Intergenerational Trauma and Violence,” encompasses the six lower level organizing themes: Indian Residential School experience, dysfunction in family life, trauma, domestic violence, determination and hope.

The IRSS is arguably one of the most detrimental and inherently violent components of Canadian colonialist history. The physical, sexual, and psychological abuses directly affected the students with the cascading effects of intergenerational trauma impacting subsequent generations. Former students were unable to cope with the anxiety, stress, and trauma resulting from their experience. As such, the negative implications of the IRSS carried forward and manifested in the form of severe dysfunctions in family life. The IRSS left former students without proper parenting skills and the ability to appropriately express emotions. Furthermore, the IRSS negatively impacted the way in which former students viewed the opposite sex and their understanding of domestic relationships. This deficit undeniably contributed to the occurrence of physical, sexual, and psychological violence with their intimate relationships. Consequently, the children of the relationship were exposed to abuse in the home and came to except those behaviours as normal. In this way, the cycle of violence becomes intergenerational as previous generations have modelled violent behaviours for subsequent ones. The aforementioned deficiency is primarily where the second and third generations from the IRSS were impacted. The cascading nature of intergenerational
trauma ensures that later generations are affected by a previous trauma even if the eventual impact is inadvertent.

The IRSS experience and dysfunction in family life constitute obvious traumas. In fact, the primary topics of discussion in this research centered around intersecting traumatic experiences. All of the participants had a personal or familial connection to the IRSS in Canada, experienced abuses in the childhood home, and later went on to experience violence in an intimate partner relationship. The combined impact of the aforementioned traumas spurred various dysfunctions and served to perpetuate these behaviours. Intersecting traumas made it difficult for participants to overcome specific barriers in their lives. Participants expressed frustration in trying to tackle one problem in their life when there were several other pervasive issues that also needed attention. The psychological impact of this experience was overwhelming and distressing for each of the participants at different points in their lives. However, participants indicated that the aforementioned experience also served as a positive catalyst for change. In these situations, a strong sense of determination to overcome past abuses, traumas, and dysfunctions was undoubtedly exhibited.

Another such occurrence, domestic violence, focuses on abuse in intimate partner relationships and the resulting consequences for the victim, abuser, family, and larger community. Participants spoke at length of the physical, sexual, financial, psychological, and verbal abuses they endured at the hands of their violent partner. Key to this research is the understanding of the connection between witnessing and experiencing violence, whether in the IRSS or family home, and subsequently normalizing that violence in an intimate partner relationship. This relationship was confirmed by all of the participants.
with the common understanding that dysfunction breeds dysfunction. The normalization of domestic violence often manifests in the form of minimizations and rationalizations. Participants felt that the physical, sexual, and psychological abuses they were experiencing were acceptable and commonplace behaviours in intimate relationships because they had witnessed their parents be violent towards each other. Some participants advised that they felt as though they didn’t deserve better than to be abused because violence was all they had known throughout their life. The normalization of this violence became more pronounced as the violence continued to be tolerated within the relationship. In spite of this, there came a point where participants recognized the detrimental impact of this violence in their life. Participants worked to flee their abuser and to take the appropriate steps towards living a life free from violence.

Regardless of the aforementioned barriers, adversities, and metaphorical roadblocks, participants demonstrated a strong sense of determination. All of the participants were hopeful that the future generations of their family would have a better life than they themselves had. As such, the articulation and subsequent elimination of negative influences and life choices was necessary for the transformation to take place. The dynamics at play in these situations were often multifaceted and complex. Some participants were faced with multiple barriers including addiction, domestic violence, and IRSS trauma. In these situations, participants counted on their strength, courage, and bravery to assist them in making it through the process. Hope was identified as a motivating factor for participants in their healing journey. Participants discussed their future aspirations and indicated that they were willing to work hard in order to have their dreams realized.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The preceding four chapters provided a comprehensive discussion of the research project examining the relationship between the Indian Residential School System, intergenerational trauma, and the subsequent normalization of domestic violence. Chapter one presented a detailed context of the proposed variables in the research as well as a description of the research questions and goals. Chapter two focused exclusively on the extant literature describing the IRSS, intergenerational trauma and the according impact today, and domestic violence. Additionally, the two guiding theories, Lenore Walker’s (1979) Cycle of Violence and May and Finch’s (2009) Normalization Process Theory, were presented. The third chapter focused on the methodology of this research project, particularly, semi-structured interviews, the sampling process, interview procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations. Chapter four employed Attride-Stirling’s (2001) Thematic network analysis and presented the data analysis conducted for this research project. This chapter brings together the conclusions of the research in relation to the literature and underlying theoretical approaches. It further examines the positive and negative aspects of the research process as a whole by detailing through a reflexive process the limitations, struggles, and successes. Finally, a discussion of the policy implications and impact on future research is provided.

Conclusions

This research has identified a relationship between the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and the normalization of domestic violence. More specifically, this project identified a relationship between experiencing intergenerational trauma as a result of
attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada and subsequent domestic violence and its normalization in an intimate partner relationship.

The results of the analysis are consistent with much of the extant literature and theories, demonstrating the connection between the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, domestic violence, and its normalization in inmate partner relationships. The IRSS had a detrimental impact on students and subsequent generations of their family. Unresolved trauma, a loss of identity and culture, substance abuse issues, and violence were just a few of the negative cascading effects of this institution. Under these circumstances, trauma was experienced by the individual or the family unit and intergenerationally transmitted. The intergenerational trauma resulting from the IRSS has affected the Aboriginal population in many complex ways, including the normalization of violence, and more specifically, the normalization of domestic violence within intimate partner relationships. Violence was a common occurrence within the IRSS. This behaviour was perpetrated and modeled for First Nations youth starting at a very young age. As such, this learned behaviour was repeated in intimate partner relationships. In some situations, domestic violence was present in the family home. Children of these homes witnessed this behaviour, accepted it as normal, and again, went on to repeat these abuses.

The history of colonization and the legacy of the IRSS have had a widespread effect on the citizens of Canada as a whole. Its legacy has ultimately contributed to the furtherance of colonial structures, discrimination, and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal peoples. The aforementioned components have become accepted and normalized parts of Canadian society. Canadian society has, therefore, become host to a veiled culture of structural violence.
This thesis has described how First Nations peoples, particularly women, have been affected by structural violence and its normalization. However, it is imperative to note that this issue goes beyond one’s personal experience due to the pervasive attitudes contained within the social structures. Members of the community, service providers, and leaders are inundated by this culture and, albeit oftentimes unconsciously, contribute to the perpetuation of structural violence. This, in turn, can drive societal attitudes conducive to domestic violence and the subsequent normalization of these harmful behaviours.

This thesis lends support to the suggested changes made by the Trudeau government. Prime Minister Trudeau has recently announced a number of initiatives, including the creation of a national framework to address the TRC’s *Calls to Action* and an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, to strengthen the relationship between the federal government and Aboriginal people of Canada. The proposed changes have the potential to address structural violence, including the societal structures rife with racism and colonialism. In doing so, these efforts will also strengthen relations between Aboriginal people and other Canadian citizens. It is possible that the culmination of these efforts could result in the reduction or altogether elimination of structural violence in Canadian society. Structural violence is alive and well in Canadian society. Therefore, it is imperative for the federal government to follow through with their promises in order to rectify the current state of affairs.

May and Finch’s (2009) Normalization Process Theory suggests that human interactions and routine are shaped and reinforced by a network of personal and group facts. Participants indicated that violence was viewed as a normal behaviour within their
family unit and the larger community. The aforementioned violence occurred within the context of domestic and familial relationships and followed an intergenerational pattern. Consequently, the participants came to view these actions as acceptable within their own intimate partner relationships. The normalization of domestic violence within these intimate partner relationships is attributable to the fact that the behaviours had been modeled and subsequently accepted within the community.

Lenore Walker’s (1979) Cycle of Violence has been used to understand the cyclical pattern of violence that exists in violent intimate partner relationships. The cycle of violence is imperative in understanding the role of power and control within intimate partner relationships and how it contributes to sexual, emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. Participants advised that the violence within their relationships often followed the aforementioned cycle. More specifically, the participants indicated that the cyclical pattern of intimate partner violence began with the tension building phase. Participants noted that they often felt as though they were “walking on eggshells” and were nervous to do something to set their partner off. The violent outburst follows the tension building phase. Participants discussed the extreme physical, emotional, and verbal abuses that occurred during this phase. The final phase, the honeymoon phase, was comprised of loving behaviours and kind gestures. Participants talked about the anger they felt after the violent outburst and how their partner’s behaviours during the honeymoon phase convinced them to return to their relationships. An escalation of violence was noted with each repetition of the cycle. In this sense, it appears as though the violence was being normalized by the participants and therefore accepted within their intimate relationship.
Additionally, an imbalance of power was identified as a root cause for the various types of abuse and a factor in the continuation of abuse. The physical domination of one individual by another is an abuse carried out to establish power and to determine which party is in control. Verbal abuse served to negatively impact and diminish self-esteem ultimately resulting in the participant feeling as though they were incapable of making decisions for themselves and their family. Overall, participants stated that emotional abuse alienated them from their friends, family, and community. Participants felt that where their resources were limited, such as in the case of financial abuse, then so too were their options. These aforementioned abuses resulted in isolation, loss of supports, and in some situations, a choice to return to a violent relationship. As demonstrated, the findings from this research are consistent with the central tenants of Lenore Walker’s (1979) Cycle of Violence and May and Finch’s (2009) Normalization Process Theory.

**Reflecting on the Research Process**

The data collection process, participant interviews, and transcription process spanned a period of eight months, from October 2014 to May 2015. Data analysis procedures followed Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic network analysis to identify issues discussed, basic themes, organizing themes, and an overarching global theme. Initially, 210 issues discussed were found in the data. However, after the completion of data analysis, 161 issues discussed remained. The aforementioned occurrence speaks to the reflexivity of the research process. The researcher moved back and forth between the data and thematic levels in an effort to reflect the salient thematic levels arising from the participants’ voices as accurately as possible.
Several issues were encountered throughout the data collection process. Recruiting participants for the interview process proved to be a difficult task for a number of reasons. The researcher had intended to recruit participants through the use of an informative recruitment poster. However, there seemed to be a reluctance to participate in the project as only two people had expressed interest in participating in the four months following the commencement of putting up the posters. The researcher eventually employed snowball sampling to enlist new participants for the project. Initially, seven participants expressed interest in participating in the research project. Five of the seven women went on to complete the interview process while two declined participation. The researcher encountered significant trouble in scheduling interview times with the participants. On multiple occasions, the participant did not show up at the mutually agreed upon interview location or they contacted the researcher to reschedule. Two participants indicated that they had cancelled their interview multiple times because they were experiencing stress and anxiety around the prospect of recounting their traumatic past. The researcher did not pressure any of these individuals to participate in the research project. Rather, the researcher followed up with participants after each cancellation and canvassed with them whether they would like to reschedule their interview. All of the participants advised that they were happy they had participated and that their stories were contributing to a positive research initiative.

*Future Research*

Future research focussing on Aboriginal populations, the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and domestic violence could be impacted by this research project. Research on the aforementioned topics needs to take place within a safe and culturally sensitive
environment given the nature of the topic at hand. The researcher consulted with Elder Noel Starblanket about the research project and employed skills acquired through four years working in the Domestic Violence Unit at Family Service Regina. Additionally, the researcher provided participants with information on agencies they could connect with if they needed support following the interviews. This research project identified yet another detrimental outcome of the IRSS in Canada. As such, future research can consider this outcome in concert with the other previously identified variables as well as their specific research variables.

This research considered the experience of five First Nations women in Regina, Saskatchewan. As such, the according findings are limited to understanding a very specific portion of this population. Future research could broaden the focus of this research to include participants from across the province and country. This would allow for a broader conceptualization of this issue and a greater understanding of the relationship between the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and the normalization of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships. It is imperative for future research to examine the behaviours, thoughts, and perceptions of violence in previous and later generations. This would lend to a greater understanding of the transmission of the aforementioned attitudes and would garner valuable insight into the reasons for why and how these beliefs have been perpetuated.

The criteria for inclusion in this research project was limited to Aboriginal females, over the age of 18, who had a connection to the IRSS in Canada and who had experienced some form of domestic violence. The First Nations participants noted that their abusive partners were also suffering from the residual effects of the IRSS and the
according intergenerational trauma. As such, it is important to understand the perpetrators of this violence within the context of the IRSS and intergenerational trauma. Participants in this research advised that they normalize domestic violence because they had grown up as a victim of abuse and a witness to the acceptance of this behaviour. It may be possible that the same thought patterns exist in Aboriginal men who grew up similar environments.

_Policy Implications_

This research project could potentially influence policy surrounding the most effective practice in working with Aboriginal women experiencing domestic violence. For direct services providers, particularly those working in victim services programs, safe shelters, and counselling agencies, an understanding of the reasons for normalizing domestic violence will enhance their service delivery. More specifically, an understanding of the intergenerational effects of violence and the harmful outcomes of continually witnessing violence will allow these professionals to understand the complex circumstances of their clients. In these situations, there is more than just the “traditional” cycle of violence that needs to be taken into account. The cycle of violence needs to be considered within the larger context of colonialism, the IRSS, and intergenerational trauma.

In working with these women, service providers will have an alternative way to frame their clients’ situations and to convey the seriousness of their situation to them. Connecting the client with a counsellor may be a helpful practice in understanding the complexities of their attitudes towards violence. Additionally, this practice may also assist in reframing the client’s perception of their situation and could serve as an impetus
for change. This will also result in a shift of focus from just addressing the cycle of violence to discussing these issues within the context of the IRSS, intergenerational trauma, and the normalization of violence. As such, service providers may want to discuss violence, the consequences of being in this type of relationship, and that abuse is unacceptable in any circumstance.

This research may also be useful in the education and training of service providers. The addition of educational modules reviewing the history of colonization, the IRSS, and intergenerational trauma would lend to an understanding of racialized societal structures and their impact on the context in which services providers conduct their work. A therapeutic support group designed specifically to address the harms of the IRSS and the resulting intergenerational trauma would be a useful community support. This would assist clients in understanding the root cause of their tendency to normalize domestic violence.

The IRSS has had resounding effects and this detrimental impact is occurring due to the constant and pervasive normalization of violence. Society cannot dismiss the IRSS as an event occurring in the past and metaphorically brush it under the rug. As demonstrated in this research project and countless others, the IRSS is still having an inherently negative impact today on former students and several subsequent generations of their respective families. As such, it is imperative for the general population to garner an understanding of the widespread impacts of the IRSS and the cascading effects on today’s Aboriginal population.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Department of Justice Studies

Research Title:
Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma amongst Aboriginal Women in Regina, Saskatchewan

Dear <Name will be inserted once known>:

I am contacting you as a graduate student at the University of Regina in the Faculty of Arts (Department of Justice Studies). I am seeking your participation in a research project that I am undertaking. The primary research objective is to gain an understanding of the relationship between intergenerational trauma and domestic violence.

In order to carry out this research, I am requesting your assistance. Your participation would involve putting up a recruitment poster in your agency and referring potential research participants to the researcher. In the event that you agree to participate, I will provide paper copies of the Recruitment Poster to your agency. Once the research is completed, an electronic copy of the final report will be provided to all participating agencies.

Great care will be taken to ensure that the identity of all participants is kept confidential. Additionally, all information pertaining to this research project will be kept in a secure and password protected location.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me by phone at (306) 570-6900 or via e-mail at hoffartr@uregina.ca.

I wish to sincerely thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Renée Hoffart
Graduate Student, Department of Justice Studies
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

We are looking for Aboriginal female volunteers to take part in a study regarding intergenerational trauma and domestic violence.

**Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma amongst Aboriginal Women in Regina, Saskatchewan**

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to meet for an individual interview where you would describe your previous experience with domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship as well as your experience with intergenerational trauma. Interview questions would focus on childhood perceptions of violence, attendance at an Indian Residential School in Canada, and domestic violence. Your participation would involve an interview of approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact: Renée Hoffart, Graduate Student, Department of Justice Studies, at hoffartr@uregina.ca.

This study has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina.
Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma amongst Aboriginal Women in Regina, Saskatchewan

Researcher(s): Renée Hoffart, Graduate Student, Department of Justice Studies, University of Regina, hoffartr@uregina.ca

Supervisor: Nicholas Jones, Department of Justice Studies, (306) 585-4862, nick.jones@uregina.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:
• This project intends to look at the relationship between the Indian Residential School experience and domestic violence amongst Aboriginal women in Regina, Saskatchewan. More specifically, the researcher will be conducting research to identify whether the Indian Residential School experiences affects one’s perceptions of domestic violence. Additionally, this research will lend to an understanding of domestic violence in Aboriginal populations and may assist in the formation of solutions to tackle this issue.

Procedures:
• The interview will take place during a time period, lasting approximately 30 minutes to two hours, in a confidential, safe, and mutually agreed upon location.
• The researcher may need to contact participants following the interview to clarify information or obtain further information.
• The researcher will review the consent form and the purpose of the research before beginning the formal interview and again at each subsequent point of contact.
• Given the length of the interview, participants have the option to take rest breaks as necessary. Participants can verbally signal to the researcher when they need a break.
• The interview will consist of open-ended questions (e.g. “tell me about a time when…”).
• Participants can ask for clarification on all questions at any point during the interview.
• All interviews will be audio recorded from start to finish. Additionally, the researcher may take detailed notes.
• Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study and/or your role.
• The researcher has a professional obligation to notify the appropriate authority about criminal/child protection concerns. For this reason, avoid disclosing the aforementioned information.
**Potential Risks:**
There are some possible risks to you by participating in this research. Some participants may experience emotional and psychological stress as a result of sharing their experiences.
- Risks will be addressed by Renée Hoffart, the primary researcher.
- The researcher will provide contact information for counselling agencies in the city (Family Service Regina, the Caring Place, Catholic Family Services, University of Regina Counselling Services, Greystone Bereavement Center, the Regina Sexual Assault Center, Eagle Moon Healing Center, Aboriginal Family Services, and Circle Project). Additionally, information on crisis lines and crisis services (Mobile Crisis Services, the Sexual Assault Line, and the Crisis/Suicide Line) will be provided to participants.

**Confidentiality:**
- To ensure confidentiality, participants will not be identified by name, unless one so chooses, in any portion of the research process or final document.
- The identity of the participant will be kept on a password protected official University of Regina email. Any other information which could potentially identify a participant will be kept on a password protected USB drive.
- Participants have the option to choose a pseudonym for themselves. This is the manner in which they will be referred to during the research process and in the final thesis.
- All data collected will only be accessible to Renée Hoffart (Masters Student) and Dr. Nicholas Jones (Supervisor) unless required by law.

**Right to Withdraw:**
- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position [e.g. employment, access to services] or how you will be treated.
- Should you wish to withdraw, you must e-mail Renée Hoffart at hoffartr@uregina.ca to indicate as such.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data has been pooled (December 2014). After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it will not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Follow up:**
- The researcher will provide either an executive summary or electronic copy of the thesis upon request.
- If you would like to obtain results from this research project please email hoffartr@uregina.ca or provide a way for the researcher to be in contact with you.
- Upon request, the researcher will provide an electronic draft copy of the final thesis for review prior to submission. Participants will have a one week period within which to suggest potential revisions.
Questions or Concerns:
- Contact the researcher or supervisor using the information at the top of page.
- This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca). Out of town participants may call collect.

Continued or On-going Consent:
- The researcher may need to contact the interview participant to clarify information. If this is necessary, the researcher will get in touch with the applicable participant(s) and review consent at each subsequent point of contact.

SIGNED CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

________________________________________  ___________________________________________
Name of Participant                      Signature

________________________________________  ___________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature                    Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher. By completing and submitting the questionnaire, YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study.
Appendix D

Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and why you decided to participate in this research?

2. What is your connection and/or experience with the Indian Residential School System in Canada?

3. Did you or they witness and/or experience any forms of violence in an Indian Residential School?

4. Did you or they witness and/or experience any forms of violence in the home as a child?

5. Can you describe your experience with domestic violence?

6. Do you draw a connection between the Indian Residential School System experience/intergenerational trauma and the normalization of domestic violence? If so, how?
Appendix E

Counselling Agencies in Regina

Family Service Regina: (306) 757-6675
The Caring Place: (306) 347-2273
Catholic Family Services: (306) 525-0521
University of Regina Counselling Services: (306) 585-4491
Greystone Bereavement Center: (306) 766-6947
The Regina Sexual Assault Center: (306) 522-2777
Eagle Moon Healing Centre: (306) 766-6995
Aboriginal Family Services: (306) 525-4161
Circle Project: (306) 347-7515
Mobile Crisis Services: (306) 757-0127
Sexual Assault Line: (306) 352-0434
Crisis/Suicide Line: (306) 525-5333
Appendix F

Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Renée Hoffart
22 - 125 Froom Crescent
Regina, SK S4N 1S8

DEPARTMENT
Justice Studies

REB# 2014-171

SUPERVISOR
Dr. Nicholas Jones – Justice Studies

FUNDER(S)
Unfunded

TITLE
Domestic Violence and Intergenerational Trauma amongst First Nation Women in Regina Saskatchewan

APPROVAL OF
Informative poster to be provided to Regina Transition House, Family Service Regina, Isabel Johnson Shelter, Regina Police Service Victim Services, YWCA, My Aunt’s Place, WISH Safehouse, SOFIA House and the Provincial Association of Transition Houses

APPROVED ON
October 16, 2014

RENEWAL DATE
October 16, 2015

CONSENT FORM

Full Board Meeting
Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION
The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.

Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.uregina.ca/research/REB/main.shtml

Dr. Larena Hoeber, Chair
University of Regina
Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:
Office for Research, Innovation and Partnership
University of Regina
Research and Innovation Centre 109
Regina, SK S4S 0A2
Telephone: (306) 585-4775 Fax: (306) 585-4893 research.ethics@uregina.ca

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